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The Mortimers

THE MORTIMERS

A NOVEL

BY

JOHN TRAVERS

AUTHOR OF "SAHIBLOG," "HAPPINESS," "A SERVANT WHEN HE
REIGNETH," ETC., ETC.

HODDER AND STOUGHTON
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Annex

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“ His Angels He chargeth with folly. How much more
Them that dwell in Houses of Clay.”

“The mightier man, the mightier is the thing
That makes him honour'd, or begets him hate;
For greatest scandal waits on greatest state.
The moon being clouded presently is missed
But little stars may hide them where they list.”

A GREAT northern cantonment of the Punjab struggled for breath like a strong man strangled by asthma. Huge mountain ranges that towered forty miles away lifted their forests to dry stars. The monsoon had failed, giving its waters fitfully from a serene sky unable to command that deluge in the hills which the parched plain and dry waterways craved.

In the Commissioner's bungalow a July night seemed stoked to white heat by the moon's merciless radiance, and a swaying punkah moved as a distraught thing in the still room where two Englishmen sat, enduring an onslaught of savage atmosphere such as their motherland never knows. They were brothers, and possessed in common a strong length of limb, blue and observant eyes, well chiselled noses, determined chins, and an unmistakable air of race. Their appearance, showing so remarkably vivid a family likeness, was too handsome to promise fame; the greatest men of a nation come rougher hewn, more adaptable, less

definitely fashioned and finished to the struggle. But they had achieved and possessed magnificence in their own persons, and presented it to the eye so unconsciously that the beholder perceived not only good looks but a long family history of good birth. They took that prestige with them about the world as unalienable as the colour of their skin. A considerable number of men and women of their class and country were either personally acquainted with these two Mortimers and their three other brothers, or knew them by name; for at their famous public school they had been of note, had won distinction at games, and had carried a queer personal charm with them into the crowded world of men, so that once met they were long remembered.

A Mortimer interested a Mortimer more than did any other man, however placed, and Digby, who commanded an Indian infantry regiment, watched John the Commissioner of Faujpore very closely while the latter quite obviously spoke his mind without conscious reserve. The two men were allies; strikingly so.

John Mortimer, the fairer, elder, bigger and less correctly handsome in face, said slowly, and with an effort, to his brother, who had arrived that stifling hour from England: "I have had letters from our dull solicitor, Crumbles. God! what a dull man! I will tell you about them later. I have had a short line from her. I'll tell you about that, too; it's important. I've seen photographs and read reams in the press——" He made a hostile gesture towards a pile of daily papers and

illustrated weeklies that accumulated the dust in a corner of the large and burning room. "But all that can wait while you tell me what I don't already know."

"I got your wire on the sixth of June," said the soldier, ignoring the sweat which drenched him, and smoking his cigarette with an air of ease, as though comfort and well-being were his, the while his person fought its terrific battle with the ghastly night. "Until then I had taken no steps beyond the one letter I told you about—I mean the one to Crumbles in which I said that, from the Reuter's in the papers, I saw your wife had turned up. I asked him whether I could be of any use—you remember? Old Crumbles replied that he had received funds regularly from you, and was putting himself in touch with her and would communicate with me if necessary. That was the second week in June. She arrived in London on the 15th of June, and the Foreign Office people and the press were all over her. I simply read the papers at Westward Ho! till I got your telegram saying: 'Put yourself unreservedly in touch with Sara.' Then I went up to London and saw her pretty well every day till my boat sailed." He looked fixedly at the end of his cigarette.

John Mortimer brought one of his hands down on the back of the other with a mighty crash to kill a mosquito. In this movement there was a release of something violent that was pent up in his disciplined frame, once more commanded to stillness and passivity in the frenzying heat. "Well?" he demanded, and when his brother met that with

a vague and tolerant gesture, he changed his question to a challenging—"What did you think of her?"

It was exactly like a Mortimer to reply accurately, "Didn't get a good chance of forming my own opinion; the general idea was so strong as to her being a first-class heroine."

"What does she look like now?" the husband asked, and those two pairs of blue eyes met frankly in amusement when the soldier replied with appreciation, "She's easy to look at, as the Americans say."

There was a silence which gradually threatened the conversation with an admission of baffled defeat till Digby Mortimer broke it as one who makes the best of a bad job. "She was staying in rooms in Half Moon Street. That elderly cousin of sorts, Miss Hall—a nice woman, who said she had heard from you occasionally while Sara was lost—hovered about, went shopping with her and all that. Your wife bought lots of clothes and seemed to enjoy it. But she was working hard; tremendously so. When she was not interviewing Cabinet Ministers she was speaking. I heard her once, at the Central Hall, Westminster. Very fine. There was some opposition, which was fairly demonstrative and lively, and she kept her end up well. I am told she spoke less well at the Albert Hall—it's too big for a woman—and better in the north, where she enlightened Labour. She would not write a word. Hates the sight of ink, she told me. Publishers and editors shed tears in vain. Sensible woman."

Still there remained the vital thing unspoken. It

animated the silence which fell between the brothers while the punkah panted to and fro.

“Did she speak much of Lavretsky?” John Mortimer asked at length.

“No.” The other brought out the word slowly, and his thoughts seemed to qualify the negative. “She kept me at a distance. Perfectly friendly, but never in the least confidential. I wasn’t much good at it, I’m afraid.” His voice was amazingly kind, almost tender, as he addressed his brother.

“*Ever* speak of him?”

“Yes. I risked a question, something pretty futile about his assassination, and she said at once—‘I can’t talk of that.’ So I left it. Another time I asked about his mentality—would she call him a brilliant man? And she said—‘He was a power, but a mysterious power. You cannot sum him up like that. I know something of what he did and a little of what he tried to do, but I do not pretend to understand him.’ I imagined she told the Powers That Be more than that, so I said to her one day—‘You must have exercised tremendous influence?’ And she replied—‘Yes, I had influence with Lavretsky till the very end, and for several months I was Director of Women’s Labour in the Province of D——. I have been worked almost to death.’ I don’t think I ever extracted more from her than that.”

John Mortimer, staring blindly into the formidable darkness of the garden, weighed in his intent thoughts a knowledge that his brother charmed women, got on terms with them very swiftly and held their confidence, yet he had failed.

“ She is a celebrity? ” was wrung from him.

“ Famous—for the moment, anyhow,” the other affirmed.

“ Damnation,” growled her husband from the bottom of his heart, and at that the brothers looked at each other again with a most understanding twinkle as of two men scored off by a woman and taking it like sportsmen.

There was an easier mental air between them for a while, and when next the Commissioner spoke it was to record with but little egotism seven years of a married life.

“ It’s a queer, blank story, Digby, since I married her at Moscow in July, 1914. My leave was nearly up and I was in a hurry. I had known her for three weeks. You can picture the middle-class one mixes with when one goes to Russia on language leave? She was different, and less like a governess than anyone you can imagine. She led the Russian family she was with—a banker and his wife and three children—by the nose. I can see her as a minister with powers of life and death! I was wildly in love with her from the first moment I met her at the British Chaplain’s house. She didn’t enjoy being a governess, but she loved the Russians. Our honeymoon was rather difficult.”

“ I bet it was. Poor old John,” the soldier thought. His impressions of his sister-in-law were vivid as lightning. He took the thunder for granted.

“ You know what it is when one is infatuated? ” John continued, and his brother nodded, for the Mortimer men had no immunity from such adven-

ture. " But war broke out, and I was ordered by wire to get back to India—through Siberia and then round by sea—as quickly as possible and to report as to Russian morale on arrival at Delhi. Sara refused to budge. Her heart was set on joining up with the Russian Red Cross. I was against it. I think I was right, though she defeated me. And the war rather crowded things out. I was pressing to be up and off. There was a mental rush. The last I saw of her was at Moscow station. She had her orders and uniform and was keen as mustard. I placed a certain amount of cash to her credit at the bank in Moscow; everything was done in a hurry. My last words to her were: ' You'll let me know what you need—— ' " He gave a snort of derision. " By the time I landed in Calcutta we were completely out of touch, of course. I did not know where her unit was. The banker wrote me that he had seen her off, and once again when he had heard from her. I wrote to the address he gave me, but she never received that letter and she did not write to him again. I remitted money to old Crumbles, and told him to expect the same amount every month and to establish communication with her. He did not get within thousands of miles of her,—not resourceful, and had no idea of military organisation. But during 1914 and 1915 she received several of my letters through the British Embassy and answered them, and she condescended to write once to Crumbles saying she did not need to draw on the money at the moment. I was trying all I knew to get out of India to some Front and told her so. She never expected her

letters to find me, she said. We were the most detached pair."

"Old Crumbles did his best," said Digby; "I saw him when I was in hospital after Loos. He had been trotting round to the Red Cross, the Foreign Office, and the Russian Embassy, busy as a beetle. I understood, then, that they had found her for him."

"Yes, for a time," said the husband. "And she received my Christmas letter for 1915. Not much of a letter, I'm afraid. I was fed up,—kept here in India. And I wanted her. I told her so. Told her she could be useful out here. She answered that, in March, 1916, by saying I had evidently no conception of what it was like on the Russian front, that she could not tell me because of the Censor, but that she would not desert her job." He smoked thoughtfully awhile. "It was hard to find the right answer to that in war."

"There was nothing you could do," Digby Mortimer said with finality.

"I thought so," the other responded, heavily. "And I was hard at work in Lahore. I did not hear again. By the spring of 1917 I thought of it as little as possible, but I hated it like poison—like poison." There was a deadly aversion in his voice. "One was always waiting."

After a pause he continued: "It was on a night as infernally hot as this when I was at the Club that they brought in my Reuters. I immediately realized that she was engulfed—lost." His words seemed for a moment to reconstruct the past scene for them both: the black Punjab, dark and scorch-

ing as a burnt forest ; the white-washed Club, bright with lamps ; the gathering of British men who were so colossally at war ; the onslaught of the first tidings of an ally's delirium ; and for the representative of Government a sudden grim conviction that his wife was beyond his rescue.

" London shed precious little light on the matter when I got home on three months' urgent leave in September, 1917," the Commissioner continued gloomily. " I interviewed one official after the other to little purpose—if ever I've sent the *mulâkâter** empty away he was avenged then." Here the brothers exchanged a broad smile that acknowledged and dismissed with the same sang-froid the world-wide ways of officials.

" You never picked up a trace, did you? " Digby prompted.

" Never. One assumed that if she survived—and there was no specific reason to suppose she did not—it was under another name. No secret service agent, no Embassy official, none of the refugees, had news of her. From the time that she wrote that letter to me in March, 1916, containing her refusal to leave Russia, till Crumbles telegraphed to me two months ago, she was absolutely lost." Lines on his brow, round the corner of his eyes, and from nose to mouth, recorded his own history plainly enough for Digby's keen eyes.

" Poor devil. *Poor devil*," thought the soldier. " What did Crumbles' cable say? " he asked bluntly.

* Petitioner; one who seeks an interview in India.

“ ‘Madame Demitriadi, said to be American widow of Greek merchant, and accompanying Lavretsky as his private secretary to London for trade conference, declared herself to be your wife in presence of British Consul Boulogne two hours after the assassination. Am making enquiries.’ ” John Mortimer quoted the telegram slowly from memory, then rose and took several letters and the cable from a despatch case on his writing-table. He handed the telegram to his brother.

“ ‘Very expensive,’ ” said Digby dryly.

“ ‘Crumbles used to madden me by curt communications ending, ‘letter follows.’ It meant five weeks’ suspense. I broke him of it at last,” the other growled. Then he dealt a letter to his brother across the table as though playing cards,— “ ‘That’s the one from Crumbles which told me Sara had been on the Eastern Front when the crash came and went down with typhus. When convalescent she got into political trouble and was imprisoned for months in Moscow. Another Soviet arose and released her. She got away and assumed a Greek name; saying she was an American married to a Greek merchant and widowed. She travelled north-east and ran into Lavretsky, who was taken ill on a train going to Siberia. She nursed him and remained under his protection.’ ” His voice clipped hard on the last word, and Digby Mortimer waded through the typed letter from the lawyer with an intense consciousness of his brother’s long sinewy fingers beating a devil’s tattoo on the arm of his cane chair.

“ ‘You know all that,’ ” John said impatiently,

and dealt him another letter—shot it at him rather.

Digby Mortimer looked at the date, 1st July, 1921, and concentrated his attention on the lines which had been marked with a red pencil. They were uncomfortable matter.

‘ As Madame Demitriadi Mrs. Mortimer has held a unique position in the Province of D—— since the winter of 1917-1918. At first our Intelligence knew little of her, but the French had more information. Her influence with Lavretsky was reported paramount and considered favourable to the Allied Military Missions. The Foreign Office are reserved and this is practically all the data I can obtain from them. It was known to nobody—Mrs. Mortimer assures me it was unknown to Lavretsky—that she was not Madame Demitriadi whom she claimed to be. She tells me that she intended to declare her real identity in England once the negotiations were terminated. Her exact words to me on this subject were : “ A very little would have upset Lavretsky. I intended to see vital public matters through first. It would have been awkward after being accepted as Madame Demitriadi by bigwigs, but you don’t shrink from a socially false position if you have doubled for your life as a hare with hounds hunting you. I intended to communicate with you after I had selected my own moment for telling Lavretsky.” ’

The soldier read this passage through twice and

received in silence the note which his brother flicked across to him.

“ You may as well read that too,” said John Mortimer.

He read it with intense curiosity.

“ ‘ Dear John, I am very much alive and find that you have never ceased to take an interest. My adventures have been many and I am no good at writing about them. Thanks for your wire and for all that you have done. When I have time to think about anything I will cable you my plans and if they don’t suit you please be frank. Seven years are seven years. Yrs. S.M.’ ”

He found comment difficult.

Suddenly the bolt was shot in the Commissioner’s strangely moving voice—“ I suppose it is the generally accepted idea that she lived with Lavretsky? ”

“ As far as I know—yes,” the other man admitted very gently. “ Mere rumour, of course. The French Intelligence believed it.”

“ Ever discuss it with Crumbles? ”

“ Twice. He said proof would be a very difficult matter in the circumstances. Almost impossible.”

“ As far as you know, did he touch on that aspect of things with her? ”

“ He told me he had not felt justified in doing so without instructions from you. But I believe he funkcd it.” And once again both the men

greeted life as they saw it with frowning rueful smiles.

From the depths of the Commissioner's chair there presently came a low-voiced comment. "She must have known herself to be supposed to have lived with Lavretsky. She might have cared to deny it to old Crumbles, or to you—eh? But she did not."

"Yes," said his brother carefully, "but her reputation—for courage, far-reaching influence, and sheer fascination—is so great that it transcends all that. Mere respectability is out-classed."

"In Russia it never counted for much," the other pronounced. He raised his mighty inches slowly from the chair and stood between the torturingly-hot bright room and the torturingly-hot dark night, bulking big in the doorway. He ruled a division containing millions of souls, tossing out there in the heat, and he said: "For a while, in London, she is staged magnificently. The drama is the exciting thing, and the fine pluck she has shown. She has had striking goods to display—adventure, information. But in a week or two the footlights will go out, and the curtain come down, and the audience scatter gossiping. Lavretsky's dead, and therefore Sara is of no more use to the Powers That Be, British or Russian. What comes next?"

His brother put it to himself in dire sympathy. "He lost his bride seven years ago. Since then he has been infernally tied to an idea that his wife exists somewhere. He seems to have found a Bolshevik's mistress. What the devil can he do

about it? ” Aloud he remarked, “ She says, herself, in her letter that seven years are seven years. She is prepared to discuss your point of view.”

John appeared to ignore this. “ Picture her here,” he said tensely, “ picture her here. Once she is under my roof the world begins to smirk at the story. That’s all that’s left of her significance. Who’ll care for what she has been, tool or weapon? It is what she is limited to now that will keep them harping on her story. If she comes to me, she comes to play second string to a Commissioner, her rule over, her rôle a prim one. Can she do it? ”

“ There’s peace and security for her,” the soldier said, and his words halted suddenly. If he held the late war in horror, as he did, he yet ranked it beyond all comparison a great task. Thankful that it was ended, he nevertheless found his existence so drenched in the atmosphere it had created that he was never free from its influence. And much of his life was tedious and trivial to him now. Sara might find Faujpore equally unsatisfactory after her tremendous adventure in Russia.

“ And here am I instead of Lavretsky,” said John Mortimer, looking very grim.

“ She may clear that up to you,” Digby urged. “ After all you are the only soul with a right to an explanation.”

“ She may,” said the big man briefly. “ But she was at the mercy of Russia when all’s said and done. As far as that goes this is at least British India to-day and I stand to see her through.”

“ By Gad! John’s a man,” thought his brother, and aloud: “ Well, if you can stick it that’s the

best way. After all a girl up against world forces . . . it's not a fair fight. And she did good work for Allied prisoners. She came out strong."

"She is thirty-one now; ten years younger than I," John remarked.

"She looks every day of it," Digby admitted bluntly.

A Hindu bearer entered, a little old bent brown person with a white beard. He offered his sahib a telegram.

The Commissioner opened it: "'Sail for Bombay to-day by P. & O. Kaisar-i-Hind, Sara,'" he read aloud. There was a queer silence, broken only by the punkah. "So that's her decision," said her husband, blankly. "She did not wait for my letter."

"She will get it rough and hot on the way," said the soldier. Then he added gently, "Is that good or bad news, old man?"

"I was in love with her once. *Mad!*" was the only answer he received.

The Mortimers slept on the flat roof of the bungalow with a punkah sweeping between them and the stars. Digby woke in the night to see a muscular figure standing out against the sky and to hear the splash of water striking John's head and neck and shoulders as he soused himself from a bucket.

"Risky," ejaculated the soldier, quickly alert.

"The heat would about kill a white woman to-night," said the Commissioner. It was the only tribute either of them paid to the fierce attack of an Indian summer. In a thousand villages—strong

units of Punjab people—the zemindar and the ryot and the hundreds of menials read in the dry heavens a doom which made certain a failure of crops, death of cattle, increase of debt. ‘What arrangements will Government make?’ was the question passing through many a slow peasant brain at midnight.

“We shall have to fight a famine this year,” thought the Commissioner, squaring his shoulders to the moon; his mind an intense energy, defying the catastrophe of the cloudless sky, the barren earth, the murmuring multitudes, and the seven years that had robbed him of he knew not what.

“ . . . Some tyrannous single thought, some fit
Of passion, which subdues our soul to it
Till for its sake alone we live and move—
Call it ambition, or remorse, or love—
This too can change us wholly and make seem
All that we did before, shadow and dream.”

JOHN MORTIMER was gaunt and worn. Malaria had gripped him in Murree, and Tudor, the civil surgeon, had forbidden him to go his fevered way across blazing India to meet Sara Mortimer's ship at Bombay.

“ What's a temperature, more or less? ” the patient had growled.

“ You're on the verge of a nervous breakdown into the bargain,” the doctor had replied. Later, he had given the Commissioner a clear and dismal interpretation of the physical and mental ills that beset him.

Mortimer went down the hill by motor to Faujapore to meet the train from Bombay, due to arrive at twilight. He sat in his office in late August and worked steadily through the files that surrounded him. After tea he bathed and changed and waited rather limply under the punkah till it should be time to go to the station. His thoughts were profoundly occupied with the fact that his

mind and body had suffered damage. He was shocked that, though his will had been set to endure, his fortitude had not preserved him from deterioration. To be weak, to have overstrung nerves, was hideous to him. He was not master under such conditions in his own house; that house of clay in which dwelt secretly, mysteriously, a spirit that he knew as Self. He had read Bergson's definition of consciousness as implying memory and anticipation, and he recognised the formidable handicap of the memories that beset him, the exciting and ominous nature of the anticipations that challenged him.

All that was orthodox in John Mortimer wrestled with all that was romantic. The traditions of his birth and profession were rigidly honourable. A man's reputation must be without reproach, which was no light undertaking. Vigilance, scruple, idealism were required in the safeguarding of his personally exacting code. In such matters he was prepared to defend the grounds upon which he took his stand as the average man will defend home territory. But imagination carried him beyond his own frontiers; he had a certain sympathy for the rebel, the outlaw, the underdog, if the individual was neither paid agitator, intriguer nor cringer. If there was a bold challenge, or a patient unself-conscious pathos, John Mortimer was attracted.

All the Mortimers looked to see a thing properly done: a game well played was an art of which they had a better understanding than a picture well painted or a book well written, but for mediocrity they had nothing save impatience and they hated it

in themselves, abstaining as far as possible from all meddling with mysteries of which they had not the magic. John had a tense feeling, vivid and strong, for a first-class polo pony. He had another feeling equally strong, but slow and infinitely gentle, for a miserable weak knock-kneed horse straining in the shafts of a tonga. Pride had forced the Mortimers to work reluctantly, but seriously, for examinations, and John as the elder followed in his father's footsteps and went into the Indian Civil Service; the army and navy took the others. Fate dealt fearfully with the whole family by making them subject to moods, and they set forth into the world with wayward temperaments and endowed in varying degrees with a personal magnetism that drew people to them, fascinated. Their mother had been a woman of beauty, nerves, and hot temper. She had died when the eldest child was ten years old, leaving all her family beset with quick flaming angers, but observant only of their father's quiet courtesy and strength of will, and his maiden sister's humorous gentleness. Their own hot and leaping spirits startled them and were instantly suppressed because their young eyes beheld neither rage nor rudeness and they were imitative to the point of gaining self-control. They had only one sister and she was so fragile that until she died she commanded all their gentleness and formed their habit of an indulgent manner to women. John was the moodiest of the family. In him the curse of the thing worked out in the same way over and over again. He met people with the excellent introduction of his personal prestige; most men had

heard good words spoken of John Mortimer. His tall athletic form, his bold but rather sad face, his persuasive voice together with his gentleness, made him remarkably attractive, and if he had the zest of life in him at the moment of encounter he seemed the most friendly, cheerful soul; in manner simple and unspoilt. He was shy to the point of self-consciousness but his charm survived that, and as he never courted popularity and never sought to make any effect whatever, it merely served to keep him utterly aloof from a cheap success. His spell retained its influence on the people he was with, but, suddenly, his own mood would change. While they, greatly attracted, advanced towards intimacy, his reserve entrenched itself. They demonstrated their liking, and he gave no sign that he welcomed it. They began to make claims that he should respond, should give them his intimate friendship, should admit and recognise a bond;—women sought to monopolise his interest, to obtain exclusive concessions—while his vagrant mood repudiated each demand. At last stimulated by his sensitiveness to the point of irritability he would abruptly fling free, extricating himself with a reckless grace that inflicted pain because it was a charm withdrawn. Never was man more tempestuously bored by people than John Mortimer by those who gave him greater admiration than he could return and demanded from him what they did not inspire in him. As he grew older the tale of such disappointing human encounters grew longer, more discouraging, more wearisome. He resented the claims of the men and women he so easily

fascinated. Yet that first spontaneous pleasure in pleasant intercourse, that first impulse towards good-fellowship, remained part of his personality. When the friendships formed were unemotional and unexaggerated John was staunch and without reproach, affectionate as he was sincere. In such cases his moods never created difficulties; he merely showed himself depressed or uncompanionable during their sway, never antagonistic. He hated humbug and claptrap.

In 1914 Sara White inspired in him a passion that gave him all the ecstasy he had ever dreamed of. He loved her far more ardently than she loved him and that way lay his salvation. She was physical perfection to his eyes; very tall, and her face was intensely expressive yet never grimaced any eloquent revelation to the world, but subtly and suddenly flashed it in her heavily-lashed eyes, or signalled it on her lips that at times were mysteriously sweet beyond all telling, though they could confront his gaze locked in an aloofness that seemed to say, "I am Sara White; who the devil are the other women?"

He felt that in winning her as his wife his adventure was something to marvel at. Her intensity and her indifference alike kept him on the alert. She, and she alone, had the magic to hold his reactionary 'moods' at bay. Her intolerance, her ignorance of his world, her lack of surrender to the tyrannies of social traditions and accepted opinions, roughened their brief honeymoon but never for a moment was he bored. And they had ground in common; the orphan of a naval officer without

private means, she had in her blood deep instincts for patriotic sacrifice, for honourable dealing. By whatever paths she travelled she sought a free kingdom, a power, and a glory.

No tyrant, and utterly unable to bully a young wife, John had yielded to her reluctantly when she insisted upon joining the Russian Red Cross. But it was not parting from her then as a penalty of war that had tortured him, it was losing her afterwards. It was the elusiveness of the weeks, months, years which followed. It was the long starvation of his life.

To remain a civilian in India during the war had mortally humiliated John Mortimer. It affronted all his conception of himself. In his district the best Indian manhood of the plains had responded to the call of the West, had listened to the wooing of adventure, had rallied to the Sahib. John, as Commissioner, had stimulated recruiting. He welcomed with honour the Indian officers, sowars and sepoy, who returned on leave; he did what he could for the wounded, and kept in touch with the military pensioners. Such men were warriors who had fought in the greatest of wars, and John Mortimer, in an abhorred safety, had but administered their division of the Punjab as in duty bound. Those years ate into him. Their disaster to him was irremediable. There had been a first-class war and he had been a looker-on. By November, 1918, the man's strong face was tragic.

To Mortimer, so bruised in his intense personal pride, so victimised by fate, so sensitive to the wayward impulse and reactions of his spirit, a suspicion

as to his wife's relationship with Lavretsky—one of the biggest and strangest personalities that the Russian drama had staged,—the lurid publicity that shouted her name and his aloud to all the West, and sent a shattering echo of the scandal into his own kingdom in the East, was sheer poison. The deadly thing worked in him now while he resolved to give her the protection of his home, while he determined to live apart from her if she were Lavretsky's mistress, while he grimly accepted the climax of fate's bitter jest.

At half-past six the sunbaked earth smelt of hot dust, but the worst of the twenty-four hours was over and mankind was abroad again under cloudless skies. Hockey was played on Indian infantry grounds, and short polo chukkers relieved the unbearable monotony of long glaring days to gallant youth. The Commissioner's motor bore him to the great station and everywhere he was known and marked; by the burly Sikh policeman, by the rustic bullock driver, by the weedy tonga-wallahs, by the sweetmeat seller, by the merchant from the city. There was a formidable stillness, not a leaf stirred: all traffic moved through a motionless creation like row-boats on a calm and glassy sea.

Standing on the broad platform John awaited the halt of the train that now roared its approach by endless scorching miles from Bombay, which it had left some fifty hours previously. Its windows were closed to exclude smothering dust, and dark wire kept out myriad insects and cruel glare. Inside the first and second-class carriages electric fans churned hot air. Mortimer walked towards a com-

partment holding in his mind's eye the parting at Moscow which had never contemplated this strangely-belated meeting.

Suddenly she was there before him, and her voice in his ear said with all the emphasis in the world, "I want to drop India immediately like a hot potato." There were blue goggles over her eyes, one soiled hand dried the moisture round her lips with a tiny handkerchief, and dust lay thick upon her. This was no vision of beauty. Emotion ceased; he felt that he was meeting a traveller and much luggage, that was all.

The excellent service that was his to command concerned itself with her equipment. John was free to pace with his wife to the motor, saying reassuringly, "Tea is ready at the bungalow and you'll sleep under blankets in the hills to-night."

He put her into the car and then took the wheel. It seemed unaccountable to him that his heart knocked so hard against his ribs. She said, "Can we wait for my suit case; the brown one?" And he paused there in the road while the Indian passengers flocked past them. A young Punjabi Mahomedan, with a gay chintz waistcoat worn over his khaki shirt and a regimental puggaree, suddenly took two eager steps towards him and saluted, then looked bashfully puzzled.

"You know me?" Mortimer asked.

"I have made a mistake, Sahib," said the tall youngster doubtfully.

"I am Mortimer Sahib," the Commissioner told him.

"I thought you were," the sepoy said. "Are you well, Sahib? You have grown stout."

"No, I haven't," said Mortimer. "I am the brother of Mortimer Sahib of the 200th Punjabis."

"Ah," said the Punjabi, with a deep breath. "You are the brother. I knew the Colonel Sahib in Palestine. He hit me hard on the knee at hockey and it became big so that I had to go to hospital and the Sahib of his favour came to see me there."

"He's too old to play hockey. It's a game for Lieutenant Sahibs," blue eyes and black eyes exchanged good humour. "His regiment is here now, but he is in the hills."

"That is known to me. I have a bhai* in the regiment. I go to see my bhai and to-morrow I go to Sehalah and to my house. I have two months' leave. My regiment is in Delhi. What is the service of the Presence? "

"I am Commissioner," Mortimer told him.

"Commissioner Sahib! Achcha†——" his manner greeted the biggest civil official in his division as one frankly impressed, but cheerfully undismayed.

"What is your name? "

"Nawab Khan."

"Don't break any heads in your zillah‡ while on leave, Nawab Khan. If you do I'll give you punishment and your Colonel Sahib will give me much trouble saying he wants you back again." Mortimer presented these rather gratifying possibilities with the friendliest twinkle, and the sepoy,

* Brother.

† "Good!"

‡ Portion of a district.

recognising a description of familiar happenings, showed a row of white even teeth in frank appreciation.

“No heads will I break, Sahib,” he said shyly.

“When you see my brother you may hit his knee at hockey as hard as you like. It’s your turn.” The suit case was put into the motor with a thump. Mortimer set the car in motion and acknowledged the Punjabi’s salute. All the way back to his bungalow he was conscious of what a lovely thing the home-coming of a bride might have been.

Sara Mortimer appeared anxious to hide all the disfigurements of her ghastly journey. “Which is my room?” she asked at once on the threshold.

He led the way through the dark bungalow whose many doors had been opened to the air at sundown. In a bare whitewashed room a servant was depositing her suit case on the floor and in a small room out of it the bhisti* was noisily filling a zinc tub with hot water from a kerosine oil tin. At a word from Mortimer an unseen individual on the verandah began to pull the punkah to and fro.

“Tea is in my office,” John told her. “The bungalow is stripped for the hot weather, and I am simply camping here. You’ll find the house in Murree quite comfortable.” It was ghastly how long it seemed before she rejoined him in his office. During that time he was in suspense. A stranger to his eyes had come to live with him : but he knew the voice. And what he had long sought, what he had lost in a terrible distant empire, was in some

* Waterman.

measure within his grasp. To realize this was his strange occupation while the Persian wheel moaned as it turned and little silver trickles of water moved steadily along parched channels through the thirsty garden.

When Sara entered the room it was her real return for she was now familiar, but surprising. Familiar was her strong slim height, the perfect oval of her face with its delicate little arrogant nose, the dark eyes with black lashes and brows and heavy lids, the enticingly sweet lips, the thick waving brown hair. Familiar was the well-remembered beauty of her, and now that she was groomed and dressed in fresh white it came with its old thrust against his heart. Surprising to him was her air of youth, for Digby had said she looked her thirty-one years and he had pictured a faded woman. There was a vitality about her that not even the pallor of her exhausting journey, nor the moistening of the limp curls upon her forehead, could diminish. Immaturity had gone; his wife was a woman, not a girl. And a white woman in that burning cantonment filled only with soldiers brought a contrast with her such as the moon brings when the sun sets and night is mistress of men.

She sat beside his office table while he poured out tea for her. A great map of Asia hanging on the whitewashed wall behind her furnished a background for her vigorous head. "We start for the hills in an hour's time. Have you a warm coat with you for the climb?" he asked, pre-occupied with bundobust, that *savoir faire* of India.

“ I can’t travel another inch until to-morrow,” she declared with finality.

“ Not to Murree? It’s only a few hours in the motor. You’ll sleep well to-night in the cool air. It is comfortable there—another world,” he assured her persuasively.

“ I can’t,” she reiterated ; the heavy lids drooped over her eyes like thunder clouds darkening a grey sky.

He gave her the steaming cup of tea, saying in a very gentle voice, “ Drink that and see how you feel. It’s worth the effort to reach Murree, I think, but you shall decide.”

She was utterly mysterious to him as she sat there, intensely still and rather disconcerting in her refusal to take the last step of her long journey through the cauldron of the monsoon and the furnace of the plains all the way from London. There were a thousand things he wanted to know ; details of her interviews with Cabinet ministers, her speeches, her touch on the public opinion of the nation that was trustee for all India, and above all his curiosity was burning as to Boulogne and the murder of that sinister man, Lavretsky. She replaced her cup and shot him a long level glance. “ I am played out,” she said. “ Here I stay, to-night ; dead or alive.” She closed her eyes.

“ That’s settled then,” he conceded. “ I’ll let the servants know.” He lounged lazily across the floor and left the room.

She opened her eyes and for a moment lay relaxed in her chair looking up at the long sweep of the punkah. Her thoughts were vague, but held

exclusively her conception of the fate of Sara Mortimer and her achievement of one more adventure. An hour passed while she reclined in the long cane chair, and when dusk fell upon the garden she saw her husband crossing the lawn, followed by a brown man wearing only a loin cloth, a thin weedy being who carried a trowel and who reappeared presently alone and, squatting on his heels, busied himself with the irrigation of the lawn. Parrots flew and screamed above his head. All the world seemed drowsy.

Presently the lawn was invaded. A venerable figure robed in flowing garments of white muslin advanced carrying two chairs. He was followed by servants less impressively clad; they too carried chairs. Menials with scanty clothing then dragged a dhurrie over the grass and spread it among the lengthening shadows. When a table with a lamp and all the chairs were set upon the carpet, a group of turbanned men with long coats of white linen and pointed shoes advanced together and sat down. Sara's brooding glance discerned a ceremonious intercourse among themselves, and saw prosperity illustrated by fine feathers. Suddenly they all rose together at Mortimer's approach. They were cordial and courteous. Their salaams gave the *beau geste* of the East. Their host sat as one presiding at an informal council and deep voices rose and fell. Once or twice the Commissioner appeared to have uttered some joke for a robust laugh went up. When he left his chair the gathering, after bending towards him, swayed away into the outer darkness. Servants reappeared carrying a table

decorated as for dinner and the undressed attendants with much chatter erected punkah poles and board and fixed to it a white and red cotton frill. Bugle calls from messes in cantonments pierced the warm darkness.

It was nine o'clock and starlight when John Mortimer addressed his wife from the verandah. "Dinner is ready. I hope you are better?"

She joined him immediately. He was wearing the white dinner garments of an Indian hot weather.

Seated opposite him in a circle of lamp light in which danced myriads of gnats she said at once, "It is strange to be here."

"It is stranger that for seven years you have been elsewhere," John remarked evenly to that.

"Do you blame me?" she instantly questioned.

"I blame fate," he said pleasantly.

She tried to peer into the outer darkness. "How many people live here?" she asked with seeming irrelevance.

"About fourteen servants when the household is in full swing," he answered.

"Any women?" A subtle something of the claim of an absent wife was in the question.

"The wives of the servants. Including children I daresay twenty-five people live in this compound from time to time," he told her, and added: "But that's dull news; tell me about the Prime Minister."

She sent a slow smile towards him and replied indifferently. "He's a strange little man. I only saw him once."

Refusing to be baffled he prolonged his query.
“ And he asked you——? ”

“ About Lavretsky.” The name once uttered Mortimer assaulted it with one dry word,
“ Well? ”

“ You don’t expect me to discuss his murder at dinner, do you? ” asked the reputed mistress of Lavretsky in a low antagonistic voice.

Mortimer brushed the matter aside as though insignificant. All his personal pride and not a little of his individual grace and force showed at the moment. “ We’ll only discuss what you want to discuss to-night. How’s London? ” and he laughed whimsically.

“ It has begun to eat the bread of carefulness and is dull,” she told him straight, “ except the shops. I spent heaps of money.”

There was an atmosphere of episode in that, as though she claimed to have scattered gold after the manner of an irresponsible syren, instead of with the sober expenditure of matrons. He rather liked the air it gave to the scene where he dined alone with a lovely woman in an Eastern cantonment of armed men. “ Quite right,” he said indulgently and in a mood of adventure.

But she told him gravely, “ I went mad, I think. It was like loot to me except that I paid bills with your money. I had almost ceased to realize you existed so it might have been—O, just anybody’s old money.”

Here was a different aspect of her meteor-like existence in London from his reading of it as political and momentous. Addressing this new

and frivolous vision of her he said lightly, "That finishes London. Tell me all about Russia now."

She put her elbows on the table and rested her chin upon her clasped hands. With a sombre challenge she retorted, "Tell me all about India! Could you?"

"Certainly not," said the Commissioner.

"No more could I describe Russia to you," the woman said quietly, and she went on in ominous tones, "I can tell you of a man's corpse I saw, stripped and tied to a stake and drenched in water. He was preserved there, frozen hard, like a shrimp in aspic. I can tell you of an officer I saw dragged shouting out of a train and shot; I don't know why. I can tell you of a child I saw gnawing a dead mouse. But all that's just"—she made a sweeping gesture with her white arm, raising and dropping it—"the sparrows falling. It makes an impression that obliterates everything else if you are a sensitive type. I did not see horrors every day. As to the history of multitudes I could give you a fairly reliable account of the chief political events in a district as large as France. But not to-night." She rose suddenly from the table. "I call this heat torture of a kind," she exclaimed despairingly. "It is a cruel world everywhere. I've been bitter cold at Kansk—62 degrees below zero."

"You had better try to sleep now and at dawn we'll be up and off," Mortimer said with quick compassion.

He escorted her to the wide roof of the bungalow where a bed, veiled in a white mosquito-net, stood under a punkah that rose stark as a gallows against

the sky. "Come up here when you are ready," he told her. "There is soda-water in ice by your bed and the punkah-wallah will sit behind that screen and keep the punkah going all night long."

"And you?" she asked calmly.

"I'll sleep in the garden under the punkah where we dined," said her husband quickly.

"With no guard?" she exclaimed.

"With no guard," said the Commissioner.

He had not kissed her. No embrace had reunited that strange pair and his thoughts had been much filled by this fact.

Later she again ascended to the roof and stood alone looking down forlornly into the dark pot-pourri of the garden where lay an unguarded ruler who administered a division of northern India containing four million turbulent souls; a few chiefs, a group of agitators, some priests, a handful of intelligentzia, farmers, peasant cultivators, village menials, and thousands of demobilised soldiery.

While she searched the darkness with her weary anxious eyes he looked up and saw her there outlined against stars and shadows. She and many an Indian woman in the city would turn and toss upon a roof till dawn. Even the servants' low mud houses were empty and the men slept upon string charpoys in the open. Only in one there palpitated a light.

While over all the dark city and cantonment, and in every house of clay, there lingered the terrible heat of the sun's hidden fires, John Mortimer was conscious of an unquenchable flame that burnt within him.

“ Oh, those mute myriads that spoke aloud to me,
The eyes that craved to see the light, the mouths
That sought the dally bread and nothing more,
The hands that supplicated exercise,
Men that had wives and women that had babes,
And all these making suit to only live.”

WIND rose in the night. Sara's fitful slumbers were startlingly broken by an assault that tore at her mosquito curtains and shouted through the compound, rattling dry branches, rustling parched earth, banging doors. She sat up in bed and flashed an electric torch that she had placed under her pillow. It illuminated the crash of the tall screen which in falling disclosed the gaunt and ragged person of the punkah coolie. Brown man and white lady confronted each other on the house top for an instant till a smothering cloud of frantic dust and grit blinded her. She let her torch fall and stood exposed to a nightmare that held nothing palpable but roaring wind and the coolie's voice quite close to her shouting unintelligible words. Then she heard shod feet upon the mud steps that led from the compound to the roof and John Mortimer appeared holding a hurricane lantern aloft.

"It's a dust storm," he announced, thin and active in his striped pyjamas, his big feet thrust into limp leather slippers. "Too bad; it has disturbed you, but the temperature will fall now. Come down into the bungalow. The servants will bring your bed."

She struggled out of the mosquito net and followed him through the nerve racking unrest of the storm down the narrow stairs and into the office, where they had had tea. Grey dust lay like a pall over table and chairs. She could hear the servants moving her bed from the roof to the room in which she had dressed. Mortimer set the lantern on the writing desk and instantly insects started to assault it distractedly.

"Does this often happen?" she asked.

"It is quite usual at this time of year," he answered, tinglingly conscious of how utterly unusual this mid-night situation was to him.

Sara's hair framed her face in long waving lines and was gathered into one thick brown plait that fell between her thin shoulder blades to her waist. Her clinging silken nightdress gleamed white in the lantern's rays. She showed a supreme grace and delicacy amid the dirt of the storm and there was a strong self-possession about her. She stood composedly under his burning glance as though Sara Mortimer in Russia or in India, by day or by night, called her soul her own.

How far the years had set them apart, he thought. Given such an occasion on their nights of honeymoon and all the vivid life of her would have been palpitating in his arms. "Damn the

war," said Mortimer to himself, cursing its insufferable influence.

The shuffling of servants' bare feet seemed to stir Sara to uneasiness. She turned her weary eyes on her husband. His empty pockets clung close against his athletic frame. "You don't keep a revolver handy with these innumerable doors and windows on the latch, and these dark menservants of yours hovering about night and day?"

"I have a revolver locked up somewhere," he answered, and added: "You're in British India, not Bolshevik Russia," to which she retorted swiftly, "In London they said India was in a most dangerous state."

It was neither the hour nor the occasion for political discourse. Mortimer concentrated on her mood rather than her comments and asked, "Are you nervous?"

"Yes." The answer surprised him and then her explanation condemned his superficial astonishment. "What I have experienced since 1917 distorts all aspects of human affairs. I am grown suspicious and jumpy. If many nights in India are like this I would rather eat snow and live on scenery for the rest of my life than earn your fat pay and pension here."

His recent interview with the Civil Surgeon gave him an enlightened sympathy for this exhausted woman's confession of nerves and he said very gently, "We don't have a dust storm every night." He noted her quick start as someone knocked at the door and the bearer's voice announced in Hindustani that the Memsahib's room was

prepared. Before her arrival in his house old Kalyan Das, the bearer, would have padded into the office or any other apartment, but now the place that held husband and wife in the night hours was cut off, utterly private, not to be invaded. That secret aspect mocked Mortimer and yet intensified his consciousness of his wife when she made no movement towards the bedroom which he told her was now ready, but slipped instead on to the long cane chair and declared herself thirsty.

He poured out soda water for her and she took the glass with a smile that shone up at him through her long lashes. There was nothing unkempt or careless in her pose; she seemed aware of the soft shimmer of ribbon and silk and lace that enveloped her, and she forced him to be aware of it. "What a nuisance a woman is," she murmured, "I have kept you busy on my behalf since tea-time yesterday."

"It's a pleasant change," he responded charmingly. "And we must make up for lost time."

"Seven years," she began, her arms flung up and folded behind her head.

He leant forward, tensely. Would she now make a confession, a declaration? Would she let him know what had happened in Russia? The dust storm had died down but some other storm was lifting the white folds above her breast. Without any explanation she had entered the door he opened to her as a refuge from the world: the straight thing, the direct thing, was for her to let him know immediately what he most needed to know. Silence was betrayal of his hospitality.

Suspicion must and would dishonour their sensitive relationship. During a long moment he felt she was about to give him facts. Then she deliberately closed her tragic eyes, relaxed, went like a little child to sleep.

He sat very still, enduring his fate. He had groped for this woman amid the immensities of an empire expiring in revolution and the lost thread of his enquiries had wavered—loose ended—uncertain whether unexplorable death had not obliterated all clues. Now that she was here, quick life, by his side with only an ashen dust drifting between them, her obvious indifference to him as a man dissociated her completely from the point where their lives had once met, from the past in which he had played the ardent bridegroom. He remained in sight of her wild dreaming face, poignantly alone.

His dissatisfactions bred morose thoughts in him until in the last hour of night when dawn brings shy company to the earth, a door was knocked upon once more by Kalyan Das.

“Protector of the Poor,” said the old voice, “a zaildar* has brought some urgent news.”

As Mortimer slipped gently from the room, his wife stirred and woke to watch with drowsy eyes the day come peeping through the slats of the chics, and to feel a breath that was almost cool steal through the four doors that opened north and west to the quiet garden. Ten minutes and more passed while she lay there, inert, stiff, and mournfully reluctant to meet a new day. Then her hus-

* Petty official in a rural district.

band pushed aside a blind of split cane and approached her, fully dressed. She rose like an exhausted ghost to greet him, her hair ashen with powdered dust.

His briskness roused her heavy languor. "Breakfast is on the verandah and your bath is ready in your room. I have sent for a motor to take you to Murree. You ought to start in an hour's time. Before the sun has power you should be in the lower hills."

Again she seemed more concerned to hide her haggard greyness from his eyes than to heed his words. With an exclamation of, "I shall be ready in five moments," she turned and fled into the room which had been prepared for her.

Since their meeting the day before Mortimer had been intent on observing her rather than exerting influence. He said no word now, but when she had vanished unlocked a drawer in his writing table and took out a revolver and loaded it. Having placed it on his person he sat down to write brief orders.

When Sara, dressed for the journey to Murree, came out into the verandah she found her husband there giving despatches to a camel-sowar. The man salaamed, mounted and swayed aloft on his strange beast, bells tinkling and coloured fringes fluttering. As he swung through the whitewashed mud gate-posts the sun's rays suddenly lit up the whole scene as though electric lights had been turned on to disclose some giant stage, set with a curving drive where two motors waited; a green lawn and palms in the foreground, a fantastic

banyan tree by the boundary wall; and in the middle distance some square flat-roofed bungalows in wide compounds, backed dimly by pale broken outlines that stretched to the great bulwark of the Himalayas rising as a purple shadow from the dun coloured plain to the morning sky.

Mortimer turned to the breakfast table and his wife. "I am sorry that I am obliged to send you in a hireling motor," he said, "but I shall have to go over rough country roads at a considerable pace and I know our own car can travel. Everything is ready for you in Murree, and Kalyan Das will go up with you. It is a pity Digby is still on leave in Kashmir, but the General's wife will show you the ropes if you feel at a loss. I shall join you in a few days."

"I thought you were coming to Murree with me?" she cried in surprise.

"I thought so too," he replied, "but I find this morning that there is a matter I have to settle on the spot. The place is about thirty miles from here. It is a nuisance."

She seemed to deliberate. "What is Murree like?"

He answered, lightly impatient, "Cool, beautiful,—fashionable." He drawled the last word slightly. "You'll wear those clothes you bought in London. Murree is not dull for a pretty woman, I promise you."

To which she flashed with a conscious laugh, "Nor is any place, in the sense *you* mean." Her breakfast finished she announced slowly, "I think I shall remain here till you can accompany me."

But now she was in conflict with local authority. His decision was taken. "O, no. Murree is the place for you to-day." He rose and gave the venerable Kalyan Das orders she could not understand in Urdu. An ice box and a lunch basket were placed in his motor and both cars had their hoods put up. A young Sikh took his place at the wheel and two burly figures approached and in obedience to a sign from the Commissioner got into the back seat. They were sturdy middle-aged men. The Hindu had a peasant's face with every line filled by dust which clouded his beard and bushy brows. His turban was wound in slovenly rope fashion round his head and his soiled shirt was open over his brown chest. His horny feet were thrust into country shoes that were turned up at the toe and in his thin muscular hand he carried a formidable lathi* tipped with iron. He looked travel worn and in truth he had groped through the black and ill-humoured night on his ambling nag for twenty-five sorry miles. His companion, Police Inspector Mahomed Khan, wore spotless uniform and had a revolver thrust into his leather belt. His trim dyed beard on his grim face was like rust on iron. The man had a manner; he took his seat with an air and he looked at his wrist watch and enquired from the chauffeur whether the Sahib had a goodly supply of ice, as one who gauged the value of time and temperature.

The Commissioner's parting from his silent, observant wife was public. He simply wished her

* Long stick.

a comfortable journey, raised his topi and was carried off in the car. She remained seated on the verandah, fully determined not to depart for Murree that day. She was interested.

Mortimer looked at his watch as he drove through the gates; the hour was 5.40. In the civil lines only the servants were astir, but in cantonments regiments had paraded at 5.30. As the motor skirted the city there were signs everywhere of an awakening population; water was being drawn and by street pumps men were washing themselves. Laden bullock carts crawled towards a halting place. Women shrilled to children from the roofs, and the faithful were called to prayer from a mosque in the city. Presently a herd of goats shuffling under a panoply of dust filled the wide road from cactus hedge to cactus hedge. Chauffeur, police-wallah and zaildah all shouted strident directions to the yokel who shepherded his charges with yells and aimless blows.

"You cannot arrive in time, Sahib," said the police inspector philosophically.

"We must hasten," said the Commissioner curtly. "They may be late as is the custom of this country."

"Perhaps, Huzoor. We shall see," Mahomed Khan murmured.

Mortimer's face, despite a sleepless night and that overstrain of his nervous system which Tudor had emphasised, showed calm and unirritable in the searching light. He was setting forth on strange business through the dust and the dawn. On his presence in a mud and rubble village that lay to

the south depended the life of a Brahman woman. Unless he reached the spot in time it was ten chances to one that she would burn.

If there was knight errantry in his adventure his prosaic purpose was to maintain law and order. Great Britain had forbidden this thing nearly a hundred years ago. His memory held a student's knowledge of human burnings; each condemned and rejected. The flaming death of the Maid, the faggots that kindled beneath contentious prelates or hysteria-ridden witches, the fires that licked their way through woods where wounded writhed—these represented the intolerable deed, the infernal fate. The social sense of his race moved the very depths of him to avert so inhuman an act in the division he ruled. He would have liked to clatter stridently and threateningly through that silent plain as the Fire Brigade clatters in scarlet and gold beauty through London streets to quench fire.

The motor turned aside off the main road to Murree and plunged its way along a kutchra track that ran between broken ground, some mere scrub, some cultivated, all parched in the fierce drought. A ragged fellow rolled past him leading a string of uncouth camels. He salaamed to the sahib. Some naked boys drove forth great squalid water-buffaloes to distant pastures and one brown imp with shaven head, protruding ribs, and marks like white leprosy upon him cringed almost into the dust. All the immense plain began to shimmer under the increasing power of the sun. And as the motor passed the tossing mounds of a silent Mahomedan burial ground one of its tyres burst

with great noise. When the chauffeur stopped the engine and got out to adjust a Stepney wheel the terrific heat struck and enveloped the immovable car which now ceased to create a draught of air. Mortimer's hand touched the handle of a door and shrank from its blistering contact. He turned in his seat and questioned the Hindu. "How old is this woman?"

"I do not know, Sahib."

"Has she children?"

"I have heard that there is a son."

"Does the son live at home?"

"Nay, Sahib, he is a sepoy."

"What regiment?"

"Protector of the Poor I have forgotten. I think it was the 300th Rifles."

"They are in Waziristan."

"I do not know, Sahib."

"When did her husband, the subadar, die?"

"It is four days."

"Then his body was burnt three days ago."

"Perhaps, Sahib, I do not know."

The harsh voice of the Mahomedan policeman struck in. "Without doubt if he died at dawn four days ago his body would be burnt that evening. The heat is now great."

"The subadar was a good man?" Mortimer persisted.

"He had a good name, Sahib," the zaildar replied. "He was well known to me. He was a pensioner of the 300th Rifles. He had three acres of land; it is not good land, being far from the village and there are no wells. He has a brother who is a bad man."

Mortimer's voice was very kindly when addressing this rustic; he seemed to appreciate the fatigue, the patient gloom, the staunchness of the zaildar. "When did you get tidings of all this?"

"Sahib, first I heard the subadar was dead of a fever. All the zillah knew this and many men were sorrowful. Then the lumbardar* of the next village came to me and said that the widow would be sati†. The lumbardar's son is the husband of my daughter. I said, 'Perhaps it is a lie,' but the lumbardar said, 'It is true talk. Most certainly she will be sati.' A strange Brahman is come many days ago from Lahore. I do not know if he is from Lahore but it is thus reported. Perhaps it is true. After the lumbardar had gone a bhai from that village came to me and said that when it was known that the widow would be sati all the young men met together crying, 'Hindu-ji ke jai!'‡ Then I went to the Tehsildar|| and made a report and the Tehsildar sent me to the Presence. I have done much service."

A flicker of something menacing crossed the harsh face of Mahomed Khan, toiling over the Stepney wheel, when he heard of the yeoman's cry of Hindu sovereignty, but he merely croaked in his strident voice, "Tehsildar Abdur Rahman is a strong man. By now he will have arrived at Thadiana."

"Hasten, Kirpa Singh," said Mortimer to the chauffeur. The tyre had burst in a very solitary place and the earth seemed to hold no human beings

* Headman.

† A Hindu widow's religious suicide.

‡ "Hail to the Hindus!"

|| Indian magistrate of the Tehsil district.

save those by the motor. Mahomed Khan's fellow Believers had held rule over the Punjab during the Mogul sovereignty. The zaildar was a man of peace and his Hindu mind was stagnant with subservience to caste, sodden with awe of the Brahman. The chauffeur wrestling with the wheel was Kirpa Singh, a Jat Sikh whose forebears had dominated the province and in arms had defied Britain and All India from 1842 to 1849. Mortimer was serenely aware of the ambitions with which the races of his companions, and the hillmen of Nepal, were impregnated. Mahomedans recalled the splendid Mahomedan dynasty and saw themselves as lords and masters again; Sikhs dreamed regal dreams of re-establishing their sovereignty over the Punjab and fertile Kashmir; Hindus believed that the ascendancy of the Brahman would subjugate all lower castes and alien creeds throughout India; and Nepal felt certain of conquest as far north as Delhi—if the British Raj vanished like the sun sinking below the horizon. Thus they made a strange expeditionary force, those three dark men, under the Englishman's command.

Mortimer had set out to withstand the mysterious influence which religion was in the act of invoking against the Government of India. The Caliphate cry had roused thousands of Mahomedans: simple men lived under the British Rule shaken in their consciences as Israelites of old might have been shaken, had they refused to be led out of Egypt at the call of Moses. The Khalsa* had taken the law

* Members of Sikh community.

into its own hands in grim matters concerning a Sikh shrine and its administration; blood had been shed in savage butchery and all blame was cunningly attributed to the Provincial Government. But Hindus of the Faujpore division had remained curiously passive, and had given the Commissioner little political trouble. Now, swiftly as wind and panic travel, the mischief had begun. If this poor Brahman widow committed sati at the instigation of a crafty priest, she might by her sacrificial and rebel death kindle such a state of religious excitement as would set Hindu village against Mahomedan village and inspire young men to desperate acts. Since the woman's husband had been an officer, and her son was a soldier, the torch of this calamity might set fire to inflammable material in a regiment composed half of Hindus and half of Mahomedans. "Get on, Kirpa Singh," Mortimer urged vehemently once again.

"It is now finished, Sahib," the impassive Sikh said, and the motor plunged through the dust of the rough road.

They had jolted and jarred over a few more blazing miles, through unbroken silence and solitude, when the policeman suddenly lent forward and pointed across Mortimer's shoulder towards a line of telegraph posts standing black as ink against a sky of brass. Several of the posts had been felled and some hundreds of yards further on the thin line of wire was again broken.

"Budmashes* have cut the wire, Huzoor," said Mahomed Khan.

* Bad characters.

The road grew so bad that the four men had to get out of the motor and push it for nearly a quarter of a mile. To make up for lost time they travelled at a recklessly increased speed over a fairly good surface and on reaching a slight eminence saw some distance ahead in the dry bed of a nullah a compact party of fifty men and more; some riding, others walking, and all carrying their formidable iron-tipped lathis. They looked like little black ants and the rocks were pale as sand.

"They go to Padhana," muttered Mahomed Khan, mentioning the name of a Mahomedan village.

"Perhaps," admitted the old zaildar gruffly. "But there are police at Padhana."

A hoarse shout rose in the still air and came echoing back from the nullah across the broken dunes of the tossing plain.

Then there dropped from a little field that brimmed the steep cutting through which the kutcha road ran the athletic burly form of Nawab Khan, sepoy of the 200th Punjabis, his purple shadow sprawling behind him.

"Stop," commanded Mortimer, and Kirpa Singh halted the motor.

"Sahib," said young Nawab Khan, saluting, "some Hindus have done many devilish deeds. I hear that the Tehsildar is slain. The village of my parents-in-law has been burnt. I go swiftly to get help."

"You have found help," said the Commissioner.

“ Husband, I come :
Now to that name my courage prove my title!
I am fire and air : my other elements
I give to baser life.”

FROM Benares to Samarkand is a long cry, but Chunder Bōse had nourished the guile of his subtle and masterful nature in both places. As a little boy the smells and sounds and sights of Benares were the whole earth to him. Nothing existed more holy than the Ganges, sacred bulls, and Brahman priests. Strange saints, naked and covered with ashes, neither repulsed nor astonished small Chunder Bōse. Worship in innumerable temples attracted him as Cinema theatres attract boys in Western towns. Burning Ghats had a morbid interest for him. For the Hindu is a born extremist. He will go naked and a wanderer at the call of asceticism. He will lie on his back with one arm pointing at Heaven till it withers at the summons of the spirit to overcome the flesh. He moves in a world most strangely and arbitrarily endowed with weird character, and the virtue that goes out of all living things ; so that the touch of a low-caste man is pollution, and the eating of

cooked fruit or vegetable or butter from his hand contamination. In his world animal creation is divine, or damnable. His widow, if high caste, may not re-marry and if orthodox will fast and despair through life dressed in a shroud, a thing of ill-omen. Before the coming of the British she burnt regally to death on her husband's funeral pyre; consumable in her person despite pain and fear because her very being from the moment of birth was regarded as destined for the consummation of marriage; which destiny she must fulfil at the hour of womanhood without seeing the bridegroom till he became her husband whom she might not survive.

Among marigolds and images, priests and pilgrims, tourists and temples Chunder Bōse received a modern materialistic education. While every fanatical impulse in the sacred city found a place in the youth's strange nature, his quick and retentive brain absorbed modern languages; studied history and literature and law. He became an ideal instrument for sedition because he loved the work. All morbid, sinister, deadly things fascinated him. In his mentality there was no conception of merriment. He was devoid of humour. Simplicity and jollity were foreign to his nature. He could not dig erring humanity in the ribs, he would have disembowelled it expertly. On the whole he resembled a spider. He was a social poison. He uttered a jargon that was clever enough in its way, and judged by words only Chunder Bōse might have been considered an idealist; misguided, fanatical, but altruistic. As

a matter of fact he was a being antagonistic to Life : only in its fantastic repression could his malign spirit find satisfaction. Poverty had no pathos for this dark soul, women no sweetness, gallant men no glamour, beauty and peace and content no satisfaction. Fun could not infect him ; he was more attracted by an epileptic fit than a convulsingly funny jest. A happy-go-lucky British view of life was intolerable to him. The inquisition was the only European institution he respected in history. He was astute, and power drew him like a magnet. He coveted the sway of spirit over spirit and used such influence to tyrannise over incarnate life. Under a mild manner he was cruelty itself. The polish of his courtesy was the glitter of steel. In Vancouver and Samarkand he acquired a technical expertness in the destruction of peace on earth. As an emissary of political unrest sleek slim Chunder Bōse, Brahman priest, found a victim ready to his hand in the hysteria-ridden middle-aged widow of bluff Subadar Ram Das,—sweet and shrewd and ardent in her youth, unbalanced and almost mad in the course of her years. There was secret corrupt pleasure for Chunder Bōse in the ritual of the flame.

Before dawn broke on the day appointed for her suicide many Brahman villagers were whispering. Strange emotions vibrated. That mysterious potent power—woman, was giving to each and every man a terrific sensation. Religion, allied to such strong stimulants to the imagination of crowds as fear, pain, danger, death, was intoxicating the sombre life of a rural community that was Twice

Born, sacred. For weeks that community had had its passions roused by Chunder Bōse's denunciations of vital scandal. He said high caste widows had ceased to fast and shrink from normal existence; those with Government pensions had been known to buy adornments for their ill-omened persons; young widows had gone a-gadding, and worse. The people grew restless under those assertions and insinuations. All women lent bewildered ears; old women were violently and passionately obsessed by his spirit of persecution towards those who rebelled against an orthodox attitude to the death of man, and who refused to become part of that calamity, flesh of its flesh. And since a sense of sin in a strong community leads to a bitter hue and cry to discover guilt in high places there soon breathed through hamlet and village a carefully instilled idea that the beef-eating British were responsible for this evil in the conduct of young Hindu women. India was a victim of demoniac possession, and the Raj a satanic Power.

When, on the day of her husband's death, the Subadar's widow—she who had been most fanatically carried away by the agitation that moved so secretly and strangely among the zenanas—in the hysterical frenzy of her grief declared her devout and exalted intention of being sati, and refused all food, the rumour spread and entangled in its fascination all those dark eastern souls, all those formidable Punjab wills, all those peasant minds, to whom so great a religious sacrifice was an event of enthralling excitement. Men had thronged in

to the dry-as-dust hamlet from neighbouring villages for the cremation of Subadar Ram Das. Death, and the compelling ceremonial of its pageant, laid a morbid spell upon that crowd. When the gallant and loyal officer's corpse was ashes old men and young men still lingered in knots, conscious of the ill-luck of the cloudless evening sky, depressed by the ghastly sterile drought of the parched earth by which they lived, wrought upon by the malignant knowledge that the livid walls of the pale village held a slow, solemn, suicide by starvation.

Before the spell-bound bands dispersed further news spread among them that the unseen widow—who in the exalted unreason of her fasting and weakness and grief had been interviewed by implacable Chunder Bōse—had declared her amended intention to perish in orthodox fashion by fire. The announcement enthralled that strange manhood; the awe inspiring drama of her dedicated death, the morbid fascination of self-destruction, the emotional sway of religious ritual carried them off their feet. And so a doomed, unbalanced woman in the breathless heat of her humble home heard footsteps of many men and great shouts of, “Hindu-ji ki jai” and felt the magnetism of their deadly enthusiasm. That applause locked her will into a concentration which no fear nor reason could penetrate. From that moment she watched for the appointed hour of her burnt sacrifice in a state of visionary excitement, treated by the women who crept in and out, who whispered and gazed, as an object of worship. Sadhus drifted into the village

and on the last night the frenzy of the dust storm was matched by the frantic excitement of those who journeyed to the scene, or already waited there long before daybreak for the rumoured hour, the furious flame.

That sacrificial widow, obscure and mysterious, dominated the tense emotions of all watchers. Old ritual was but a vague tradition, coming attenuated through mists of many years, but it was enough for the people that she was to die as sati by fire. Crowds of men were thick upon the walls, in tiny narrow lanes and on village roofs. Boys clung to branches of every tree. Like vultures the Punjabis squatted with knees drawn up and great arms resting upon them, turbanned heads turning right and left in restless expectation. And raucous as the cry of birds of prey came their reiterated shout, "Hindu-ji ki jai, Hindu-ji ki jai!" In the courtyard of the dead subadar's house Brahman women swayed and rustled, exalted above measure by that male chorus, that male audience. To veiled uneducated women, not strictly secluded but forever enticingly withdrawn, to be surrounded thus and hear a woman thus acclaimed was to touch an intoxicating bliss. Ever and anon their shrill voices rose in the dark air, and the men outlined against the translucent sky of fading night were stirred very deeply by the sound.

Fear shuddered all about the doomed woman for this drama, increasing every hour in intensity, was terrible to other widows. Young eyes moved quickly like fluttering desperate moths, avoiding the sight of a pile of dry wood in their midst. Not

one among them there but wore the orthodox white shroud, and crouched low among the shadows when the subadar's brother, Ram Chand, went in and out through the courtyard. An evil man, denied the bold physique of other northern men and with opium stained eyeballs and a taint of illness in his forbidding aspect. Vanity intoxicated his poisoned mind while avariciousness held it in a vice. The subadar's pension had supported him and he had been frenzied by a cold panic when that tired soldier had ceased to live. Though the sepoyson would maintain his widowed mother there could be but little to spare for an uncle and the family holding of parched land was small, while opium was dear. And now, as Chunder Bōse had so craftily insinuated into his unstable intelligence, there would be a rich harvest of offerings from the pious at the shrine of a sati. Already his gaunt brown fingers curled towards the pennies and farthings that the growing multitude flung down in tribute.

He passed for the last time-out of his brother's house where the medals of the Great War lay in a tin box together with the Order of British India. Under the lintel he paused, a crooked stooping figure. Too irritable to await the appointed hour he carried a kerosene oil tin, and its contents oozed forth with a rancid smell. With one hand raised he signed to someone within the house, and as he beckoned the listless and melancholy day broke with a spreading of dawn over courtyard and roof, over veiled women and turbanned men.

The light gleamed on iron-tipped lathis, a

momentary breeze shivered among the trees, a shudder passed over the waiting men and quivered among the waiting women. There was a long agonizing pause during which most of the crowd could see nothing and the widow felt the ecstasy of her unique experience of supremacy and felt, too, the exultation of her immaculate act. And then an orange light shot up above the courtyard walls, breaking down the light of day, beating back the retreating shadows of night. A great gasp rose from the cramped enclosure, followed by the noise of a stampede of many little bare feet upon bare ground. A scattering of sparks and a leaping of flames stabbed the still air as though those piled up logs were being most frantically flung here and there, while from a rushing, flaming oil drenched figure there went up such shrieks as pierced to the very marrow of all who heard them, penetrated every nerve and writhed in every brain. It was the very voice of torture itself sounding in blast after blast of indescribable energy and then sounding no more, exhausted. A gruesome silence fell sombrely, smoke hovered as a pall and a sickening smell stained the air. Flesh and blood having discharged their mortal office were flesh and blood no longer, but charred ashes upon which fell a wandering sunbeam extinguishing the last flicker of a flame.

A small boy, desiring above all things to see this amazing event which so enlivened his monotonous life, had climbed far out upon a branch of a tree on the outskirts of the village. The dry wood cracked with the noise of a shot and the guilty

multitude, hearing that sharp sound and the yells of the boy, set up a cry of, "The police have come! the police have come!" Panic spread and the crowd swayed irresolute on housetops and wall and those on the higher roofs shouted that men approached and others bawled that they were but more pilgrims and all were held in suspense till the newcomers heralded their approach with reassuring cries of, "Hindu-ji ki jai." They were headed by a demobilised soldier, a picturesque figure with his gallant peasant carriage, his great leaping run and his violent gesticulations, who proclaimed in a voice of thunder that he and his bhais had encountered the Tehsildar and a small party of police who were on their way to prevent the Sati, and that they had killed the Tehsildar and two of his adherents. When the significance of this was realised the Hindus beheld themselves outlawed, defiant, guilty in the eyes of the Government; very desperate and exulting men.

It was then that a band some hundred strong, shouting and tumultuous, broke away from the village and set forth to the Mahomedan hamlet of J——— where there lived the father and mother of Nawab Khan's young wife. They burnt and looted it and some of its peasants perished in the flames, and they carried off what little of value there was to take, and drove the captured cattle with them through the sun and dust. Another detachment made its way to the isolated farm of a wealthy Mahomedan zemindar,* gained their ends with

* Farmer.

indescribable cruelty, and then some moved on in the dazzling light towards the village of Padhana boasting and triumphant. But there the police and stalwart Punjabi Mahomedans offered them a stout resistance and presently the noonday sun rose high over a snarling pack that slunk home one by one, their fierce faces turned now over this shoulder now over that, apprehensive of pursuit. Peasants at odds with their Government and their neighbours; solitary, sullen and afraid.

Many a Hindu military pensioner had held aloof from that dawn's dark drama. They ate the salt of the King and lay in their own lairs, profoundly disquieted by the prevailing sense of insecurity and lawlessness. Something in their iron souls responded emotionally to the passionate sacrifice of sati, but they would not march through the night to share in that religious and forbidden act. Throughout the zillah they lay low, in a strong though sombre isolation. But in the widow's village no such aloofness was possible. Rissaldar Major and Subadar Major, Jemadar and ancient pensioned sepoy, entangled in that close woven web of clay houses were unable to withdraw. Wounded men-at-arms felt their physical helplessness. Resentful and nervous they scented the power of Chunder Bōse, and adroit to save their poor remnants of lives from the terrible persecution of village enmities, acquiesced in the defiant suicide, shouted as the strong shouted, noted with wistful fearful eyes the stout limbs and formidable lathis of their comrades. But, later, when the reckless and excited manhood of their world sprawled forth

across the hot plains to kill, plunder and destroy, military veterans in Thadiana disappeared quietly, each to his house, and the wounded loudly proclaimed their pitiful infirmities. Women wailed and prayed, whispered and peeped; one gave birth to a premature child, and an ancient hag died suddenly. Those from other villages feared to return to their homes without escort, and murmuring sought refuge in the zenanas of Thadiana. Chunder Bōse and Ram Chand recited prayers and performed gruesome rites in that deserted courtyard. All but two Sadhus went forth again on their wanderings and presently aloft on a camel Chunder Bōse, disguised, swept out across the blazing plain. And while Thadiana still tossed and turned and muttered there came the sound of a deep vibrating hum and then on the rough twisting road that fitted to the village like a wry neck to a thick head there appeared a motor which bumped and plunged towards blind walls and peering roofs and finally made a curving progress across the bare earth by the village mill stone and the Persian well, coming to a halt with its back to the alarmed and guilty place. Under the shade of a banyan tree it throbbed, dark and dazzling, and from this unexpected visitor there descended with slow stiff movements Mahomed Khan, his hand on his revolver, and a Sahib carrying a light cane.

Those two approached the village together, the Indian keeping a few respectful paces behind the Commissioner. In Mortimer's gait, and in his sun-burnt face under his topi, there was the outward and visible sign to every ex-soldier of something he

had seen and followed for years, something he had trusted and obeyed. A manly but racial awe was there, and the old, old mysterious attraction. Chunder Bōse's talk of devils vanished into thin air like the spirals of smoke still ascending from pale and terrible ashes. As the village curs yapped and bristled the two Sadhus in the village stiffened and voiced their antagonism, their repulsion, calling upon the village's human pack to resist this beef-eating demon who came on quietly towards the school, the temple, and the nearest blank wall where flies buzzed and cakes of cow dung dried in the sun. Above the dogs' incoherent chorus and the weird fanatical cries of the Sadhus roared the bull-like bellow of Mahomed Khan. "The Commissioner Sahib has come! Oho lumbardar! lumbardar, come forth!"

Silence. In response to that summons the village was withdrawn, hidden, dumb. Mahomed Khan flung a stone at a cur grown too presumptuous. The poor beast fled with long drawn howls of pain and still the village crouched inhospitable and insubordinate till there swung out to greet the Commissioner Subadar Major Harnam Singh, Indian Order of Merit First Class, a very gallant gentleman at arms, saluting that man he most respected on earth,—a Sahib set in authority.

The watchful hesitating village saw the two tall figures meet, stand for a moment in talk, and then walk back together to the shade of a banyan tree, still locked in close conversation. Was that a retreat? Some of the men, re-assured, grew truculent. But the Rissaldar Major made up his

mind that if the Subadar Major gave *his* version of the day's misdoings he, too, would bear witness on his own behalf. So he swaggered out, and behind him came an old pensioned havildar carrying a chair for the Sahib. Behind these men again there trickled out a thin line of the soldiery, pensioned and wounded. The lumbardar, overcome with a very sudden sickness, lay and groaned in his house.

. . . "Thus the woman died, Sahib," concluded the old officer frankly. "Of her own wish she died. It is a custom of us Brahmans. The Sahib knows that few act thus, but sometimes it is done and to our understanding it is a good deed."

"It is never good to disobey the Government," said the Commissioner bluntly.

"I do not say that to disobey the Government is good," argued the soldier humbly. "The Presence is our father and our mother and the Presence knows that the ignorance of village folk is great. Perhaps the woman disobeyed the Government, but she is dead. It is not the fault of others. No one gave her an order to do this thing which her heart desired."

All eyes were on Mortimer's face and that face was kind. His voice was grave and stern, but his bearing was infinitely persuasive. When he mentioned the Sati he adopted a tone of quiet respect which his whole manner expressed very clearly. Confronting that anxious gathering of soldiers in the remote fastness of their homes, prejudices, and fears, he appeared to protect them rather than oppress them by his definite authority.

“ Who gave the order to kill the Tehsildar and two police? ” Mortimer demanded.

The startled group looked uneasy, but the Rissaldar Major spoke up stoutly. “ Thadiana men did not kill the Tehsildar, Sahib. There are budmashes everywhere.”

“ There are budmashes at this moment who have looted and killed and destroyed villages of Mussulmans,” Mortimer continued calmly. “ I heard that on my way here. I know that it is true.” His blue eyes scrutinised the faces around him. “ I also know that none of you took part in such devilment for I find you peaceably in your own homes. Therefore when the wrong doers are punished—and very certainly there will come a heavy punishment—it will be useless for any man to bring false accusations against you, since I have seen for myself with my own eyes.”

A release from tension stirred like a sigh of relief among those intent men, their pensions at stake.

“ We men of regiments do not play the fool like that, Huzoor,” said a grey bearded Jemadar.

“ Those who have been a short while in regiments and have left the Service and have no pensions are giving much trouble,” Mortimer retorted quietly and there was a murmur of assent. “ Such youngsters listen to the talk of strangers——” then the slow anxious minds followed the tracks of an escaping camel with its crafty rider——“ and it is well known to you Sirdars that evil talk leads to evil doing. Yet you allow a bad man to visit and remain in your district, in your very village, and stir up trouble for the old men and the young men

and the boys. Would you have permitted such a man and such talk in your regimental lines? Never. You would have made a report to your Colonel Sahib. But did you make any report to me? No—— ”

The last word was fired at the men like a pistol shot.

“ Sahib,” murmured a haggard man with one leg, “ what can the wounded do? No one fears us. No one listens to us. If we are not obedient to the very children they tyrannise over us.”

The Subadar Major took up the tale.

“ The Sahib knows all things and speaks truth. I also speak the truth. In the lines my orders were respected and all men were obedient. Had a bad character come into the lines without doubt I would have reported to my Colonel Sahib. But here in my village if I give an order who will obey me? The people of the Army have no honour as they had formerly. Certainly I could have made a report to your Honour and also the Rissaldar Major could have made a report, but Faujpore is far away, Sahib, and in Thadiana all men would have given me much trouble. To-day there is trouble everywhere for faithful men, and we people are afraid.”

Very forcibly Mortimer replied, “ What talk is this of fear? Are the bad characters of Thadiana stronger than was the enemy who wounded you in war? Were you afraid that day in action? ”

A crippled soldier lifted up his head. An extraordinarily boyish smile touched his dark face with light.

“ My Captain Sahib said I did not fear,” he ejaculated quickly.

“ Do they give the Indian Order of Merit First Class to men who fear? ” Mortimer’s pointing finger stimulated the Subadar Major who replied modestly : “ Sahib, no man is afraid when he is with a regiment.”

“ Remember,” Mortimer said, in a deep low voice that held them all in an enchantment as though old bugle calls, old days of glory, returned to their maimed lives—“ Remember the good name of your regiments. Remember those who died for the good name of those regiments. You have received honour, do not lose it. It is not for men who have fought and endured to talk of fear. What would your former officers say to-day to such speech? ”

God knows what memories of what Englishmen stirred among them then—for their eyes held the softening of affections that were buried deep among their hearts’ holdings.

“ A man must do what is right,” the Commissioner said firmly. “ You people of the Army know that law and order is always good. But no Government can give you stout hearts, and if your hearts are not stout you will become the servants of all who threaten you here. I say to you,—do not be afraid. In your own village withstand those who are the enemies of peace and attempt to intimidate you.” He turned to the wounded : “ In a trench your Sahibs were with you, *but* it was a matter of your own personal fate as to whether you received life or death. Yet you did not run

away. In India we Commissioners and Governors are still with you, but there exist many enemies of the Government and we cannot prevent all the trouble those enemies cause you, any more than your Colonel Sahib and the Chota Sahib could receive all the bullets of the foe in their own persons. You must always fight your own battles to a great extent. Do you understand me? ”

“ We understand,” said the soldiers.

His presence and his personality stated a different standard from that held by the Punjabis, but they too were courageous men, and like him could face compelling facts. They realized that he knew their difficulties and the complicated situation that existed in their homes, baking now like ovens. Above all they recognised in him the quality of consistent mercy which they—kindly and cruel by turns—so disastrously lacked. However violent he might be, in him,—in his instincts, passions, and plans,—sheer cruelty was for ever exorcised, so that his spirit influencing his immediate surroundings expelled for a time that inhuman element from Thadiana.

He lit a cigarette now and looked at his watch. “ Let someone tell the lumbardar and the brother of Subadar Ram Das to come here immediately. Tell them that if they have a sudden sickness they had better be well in five minutes.”

Several men moved off with alacrity to the village and Mortimer asked questions of the remainder as to their former regiments and that season’s crop, giving in exchange tidings of British officers and reassuring his listeners as to Government’s intended

measures of relief which the failure of the monsoon rendered necessary. Religious excitement, apprehension of police investigations, punishment of their relations, vengeful intrigue and counter intrigue, were in abeyance now in the minds of those Punjabis, and they watched the Sahib note each new comer who sheepishly joined the group, anxious enough to establish his alibi from crimes of plunder and loot which had so quickly conjured up the presence of their formidable ruler.

“Lumbardar hai,”* they announced as that depressed worthy salaamed profoundly and propitiatingly. Mortimer ignored him.

Not till Ram Chand appeared, truculent and vile, did the Commissioner break off his quiet talk of men and matters. On that vulture-like head he let loose his thunders, blasting with soul-searching criticisms and shrewd guesses the peace of mind of the evil wretch and the miserable old lumbardar. After three moments that surpassed anything the enthralled audience had ever heard, Mortimer concluded calmly to the sinister figure, who stood before him with his crossed hands on his lathi, “Chunder Bōse” (the name fell upon all like a thunderbolt) “has led the men of this zillah into much devilment. Can Chunder Bōse save them from punishment? It will surely come. As for the profit you thought to make from the sati of your brother’s wife you may have to wait for that.” Here Mortimer suddenly lent forward and very deliberately laid the hot end of his cigarette on

* “The headman is present.”

the man's hand. With a sharp yelp, Ram Chand jumped back two paces, dropping his lathi. Mortimer flung his cigarette away and put his foot on the stick. "Yes," he said, fierce and low, "fire is hot. But it was your gift to a woman this morning."

Before his intense and scornful indignation Ram Chand quailed.

"Mahomed Khan, puccaro* that man and the lumbardar," Mortimer rapped out and the policeman advanced from the motor with two pair of ferocious handcuffs.

There was a moment's hesitation and a chorus of remonstrance. Mahomed Khan's revolver pushed itself against Ram Chand's head.

"Put him and the lumbardar into the back of the motor," Mortimer commanded. He had not stirred.

The two men made a short ugly wretched scene of it—supplicating, fawning, wailing. And the villagers were not unmoved. For a moment it looked as though there would be a rush to the rescue. A great oaf of a rustic plunged forward, but gave way before a furious command. On the soldiers Mortimer's hold had not relaxed; they formed a solid wall around him now and it was to officers that he spoke as he got into his motor.

"Say that the Commissioner has been here, and tell all young men to go quietly to their homes. Come to see me, or send me word, if you have information to give and require help. Tell every-

* Seize.

one that if the wounded are unlawfully oppressed their oppressors will be punished by me. The Deputy Commissioner will arrive from Murree this evening, and will visit this zillah and the Mahomedan villages where there has been trouble. And I will come again shortly. Mahomed Khan, stop those two fools from making that infernal row." He took his seat. The soldiers eagerly lent arms and shoulders to help the car roll its way over the first hundred yards of bad road. Then the great plain swallowed him up and once again the British were out of sight, out of touch.

An hour later while the sun scorched the hurrying motor as though it moved through a furnace Mortimer saw in the distance a squadron of Indian cavalry, which he had summoned through Nawab Khan, moving out across the plain, black against the shimmering sky line; alert, watchful, vigorous and strong. A thing of great dignity and beauty.

With the affairs of his violent division of northern India heavy upon him, Mortimer pushed through the chics into his bungalow, stained with perspiration, parched with thirst and drained of the last ounce of energy by the devouring sun. He was confronted by his wife, who rose to meet him with the greeting, "What price your own revolution?"

“The great mind knows the power of gentleness,
Only tries force because persuasion fails.”

MORTIMER received his wife's unexpected presence and words with impatient shoulders, silence, and a quickened stride across the room out of her sight. Sara, once more left alone and outside his slammed door, encountered a new force. Courtship keeps a clear sky, and later during her brief honeymoon Sara had been more conscious of the amazing adventure of nature than of her bridegroom's character. Afterwards Mortimer had represented a *fact* to her; sometimes but far-off history, sometimes a law that held her, sometimes a problem that tormented her, but never a living moving human opposition, human challenge, human presence. She had held herself the stronger because as a lover he had had such need of her. When his letters had appealed to her to return to him, had asked for her presence, she had imposed her will on him and had gone her own way triumphantly.

So Sara held her breath for a moment, astonished by his hostile passage through the room, curiously stimulated by it to dive into vivid thoughts of her-

self, her experiences and powers. Very resourceful and secret were her dark eyes as she mentally conjured up flashing visions. The futility of her little passionate grandmother's efforts to rule her childhood: the miserable friction that warped her intercourse with her unmarried aunt; a strong narrow tyrannical woman, immensely ignorant of life and appallingly confident of the power of economic pressure and petty social tradition to hamper, confine, and suppress the outrageous will of Sara White. The whole neat arrangement of life at Laburnam Villa, Devonshire Place, Ealing, how she had disordered it! Her irresistible vivacity had accepted nothing as binding, nothing as rationed. But it had involved a colossal effort to escape from her family's domestic measurements of liberty, and dole of cash. They had given her a time table, with so much work, so much church, so much recreation when she claimed *life*. She had rejected their idea of books, their idea of scenery, their idea of government. Their conception of humanity was like a caged bird's conception of space and flight, height and heaven, nest and hurricane and dew. But their idea of *men* . . .

Ah, they had imposed their idea of men on her. Her great eyes filled with bitter laughter. Domestic men to whom you offered good cooking and good conduct and prim frocks. Gentlemen whom you knew sedately, and Others to whom you refused all recognition. Public men who belonged to another world; to whose speeches a mildly intelligent interest might be accorded, with measured approval or disapproval. Unknown

rich men, suspected as dissolute unless advanced in years and publicly philanthropical. The poor man at the gate who must be ashamed to beg and should be eager to work and strenuous in thrift, and who was regarded as positively and outrageously dangerous when not strictly sober. And with those ideas they presumed to train her, and equip her for the battle of life, the ordeal of sex. They thought they knew everything necessary to salvation.

Their idea of rewards was limited. She, with her wild, individual beauty sparkling forth like sunshine, was to be content with a new hat at Easter, and the little dressmaker who would make up your own material for thirty shillings. She was to accept as adequate independence the small salary she earned as games mistress at a suburban school for girls. She was to know her aunt's friends and find them interesting. She was to look for ever at Ealing; and occasionally go up to London to see a matinee, or the Academy, as a lawful excitement; and, for change of air, spend a yearly fortnight by the sea at Hastings. If she did not spoil herself by two lines between her brows—wantonly caused by sheer discontent and temper—she would marry and settle down as “a good wife.”

Against the dead weight of their ideas she had flung all the rebellion that engendered energy in her, and was startled again and again to find herself so convinced yet unable to carry conviction to Aunt Florence and her circle. She had been bruised in her very soul by finding the familiar unlovable, the goal unendurable, the personal govern-

ment which ruled her home out of touch with realities, and timid.

Certainly Aunt Florence was timid. The fact that she was one of a race rightly reputed courageous appeared to satisfy that maddening woman's self-respect. She was uncontrolled during a thunderstorm, never permitted anyone who lived in Laburnam Villa to enter the presence of a person suffering from a cold, could not bring herself to call upon a new acquaintance unaccompanied by a member of her family, was undisguisedly panic stricken when travelling, and feared new parlourmaids and the dark space beneath her bed. Yet Aunt Florence despised a coward as a thing apart.

Granny was different from Aunt Florence. Where her daughter was governed by taboos she was guided by enthusiasms. Church and state, royal family and British Empire, victories and conquests,—the old lady drew from these things a most sustaining sense of protection and imperishable glory. By such traditions she measured men and manners. And she was profoundly merciful. To fail to support hospitals, to neglect or ill treat animals, to begrudge the extra expense of laughing gas when a grandchild had a tooth out, were outrageous crimes in Granny's code. Pity was a passion that kindled fire in her small eyes, set in wrinkled and sunken brown sockets.

Sara realized indignantly that grandmother and aunt had written indelibly upon her young mind. Though by the injudicious aid of jolly old Gertrude Hall she had disentangled herself from Ealing and

Laburnam Villa and set off alone to teach English to the family of a prosperous Russian banker in Moscow, her family gods and her family fetishes went with her, encompassing her roundabout.

New and strange powers amazed and excited her in Russia. The curiosity and culture that dominated certain feminine minds there stirred her own to enterprise. Men and women discussed everything frankly. Sara mingled with people who were in turn gay, witty, idle, weak, and very potently attractive. Her employers travelled, and her eyes beheld immense provinces, unforgettable colour and movement, the slumber of a strange winter, the transfiguration of a spring unconfined by fence and pavement, high midsummer in deep forests, autumn among towering mountains. Something in her that was more than ordinarily responsive vibrated to all that awed and touched her in nature. Imagination held a close communion with the scenes her eager glance beheld. For her a perfect adventure lay in the rising and setting of sun and moon over valley and hill, in the onward rush of river and stream, in the tranquil or stormy stir of lake and sea, in the bright or ghastly garment of snow and ice, in the vivid transient beauty of leaf and petal. A dramatic fervour in her delighted to live her life staged by scenes that, unconscious of her presence, interested and stimulated her temperament. She had dared to select great spaces of Europe to look at and live with, rather than choose chintzes with Aunt Florence for Laburnam Villa. "I may tire of stripes, and roses are out of date, while light

colours require cleaning too frequently, but one can live for ever with a nice quiet nondescript pattern"—well that was Florence White's choice, abhorrent to Sara. Florence's mind and eye travelled little further than the Army and Navy Stores while Sara starved to explore all earth and sky, as had her sailor father before her.

Impatience was written plainly on her expressive face while these memories in turn held and released her: bitterly did she resent old baffling curbs and petty confinements. And then a strange doomed look came over her as her mind began to move rapidly through scenes of war and revolution. She saw herself sometimes valiant and sometimes prostrate. She watched men in pain, in drink, in passion, in terror. She beheld her own lucky star. She had known starkly what it was to be without a shred of protective prestige. As a British subject she had experienced amazingly illogical decrees of fate, and caprices of fortune. Her charm had distilled magic; something that people *saw* in her, and some power that her spirit possessed, had worked upon people and enabled her to survive. She tried to add up the cost of her achievement. An energy that an existence, so dangerous, so precarious, so mysterious had exacted from her: an appalling amount of sheer force of will; a vigilance of judgment and steadfastness of purpose: these had been necessary in order that she might keep her head . . . just keep her head . . . while Lavretsky was in power and a great tide of criticism and intrigue had been directed in a flood against him to isolate and destroy him, and

her with him. She found that she could not measure, sum up, nor gauge the intensity of her experience, the virtue of her gifts, the effect of her influence upon the temperament of others. She could but savour the emotion of her memories.

When Mortimer pushed the door open and returned, Sara was conscious that her enfeebling apprehension of finding him prim, narrow, uninteresting as she now measured men was not, as yet, confirmed.

He addressed her abruptly. "I shall have to see Colonel Grimshaw here presently. I am sorry to turn you out of my office, but this business is urgent. Your bedroom punkah will be pulled for you. I am obliged to remain here for a few days. Do you intend to go to Murree, or not?"

"Not till you go," she said, experimentally.

"Just as you like." He seemed none too pleased. "They would be nice to you up there, you know."

"Why should they be otherwise?" she flashed.

They approached for a moment the burning topic. Her voice, her challenging look, seemed to confront and defy the rumour of scandal that preceded her everywhere. Yet there was no denial in her aspect. She turned away with a hard laugh. "I wonder whether it will be worth my while to be nice to them?"

He recognised with surprise the threat in her attitude. "It is your chance to make a success of it," he remarked.

"It? Of what?" she looked at him darkly through lowered lids.

When he said nothing she injected a sharp question as though to stab him, "Our marriage?"

"No," said John Mortimer with pride in his voice. "The success of our marriage depends upon very different factors. The success of your personal career out here was what I meant. You can make friends, or enemies."

She gave him her close attention and she withdrew in good order. "Friends or enemies? I shall make both," she boasted, and left him.

They met again in the dusk of the evening with the heat sapping even her indomitable energy of will. Once more they faced each other across the bright table encircled by night. In that hour Sara was very still, very smooth, distilling a sweetness. She was no shrew, that emphatic young woman. In dealing with men she could never bring herself to assume a sourness. She reflected, "Here's another effort. Why can't I merely drift? I suppose it's not in me to be slack; I am *driven* to grapple with him. And after all it's a big situation; not one that happens to ordinary women. I have been married to this man for years and years but I don't know him at all now. What is he going to mean to me henceforth? What does he feel about Lavretsky and me? He is attractive, but of what stuff is he made?" Whether she was aware of the fact or not it was in the last question that she made her own urgent personal demand. On the rest she speculated, but she vigorously investigated her final doubt, every instinct searching.

With the adroit patience women acquire who

deal with dangerous men in dangerous times, Sara maintained till after dinner her soft silence while Mortimer ate and drank and wondered at her beauty, gathered into a space so infinitesimally small—just a vital inch or so from brow to chin and across, vivid, alert; very compelling in its interest and tyrannical spell. “She might easily become an obsession,” he thought, restlessly.

After dinner they sat in the garden and she thrust her enquiries upon him. “Aren’t you going to tell me what to-day’s fun has been about, John?”

He met this opportunity promptly and told his story well. In the obscurity of his wife’s hidden mind he felt that he encountered the ghost of Lavretsky, his rival in the art of governing men.

She probed his acts. “Why did you not enter the village?” she enquired.

“The Subadar Major asked me not to do so. He, and the other old men, and the pensioners, felt hospitably responsible for women from neighbouring villages.”

“But you would not have done anything to the women?”

“Seen them and questioned them, you mean? No, probably not. But hysteria was in the air. He claimed purdah. I let it go at that.”

“Chivalry, or concession?” she insisted.

“Only an ass, or a brute, is unnecessarily offensive,” he retorted briefly.

But Sara was disposed to quarrel with that. Perhaps to concede the point was to censure methods adopted by Lavretsky. “Depends on

what you deem unnecessary," she drawled. And then as though she quoted from memory she added. "After all, the ultimate control of humanity is fear."

"You should not believe that so glibly," John observed.

"Everyone funks poverty, pain, and humiliation," she muttered.

"Well, those villagers funk'd me sufficiently to enable me to handle them," John said, and there was an air about him of one versed in practical acts; when to insist, when to admit. It became him well; giving a prestige to his physical charm, making it infinitely worth while to look such a prince among men.

Presently he said. "This is a troublesome business, by no means at an end. That woman kindled a conflagration when she burnt. The Mahomedan Tehsildar and his small escort are murdered, there's a village destroyed and thoroughly looted; Mahomedan women outraged, seven of their men killed and a score injured. In the second village attacked the fight was a pretty even business and the Hindus lost five men killed; the Mahomedans four. A squadron of cavalry patrolled the district and rounded up some of the raiders who were straggling. The officer commanding reports having come upon a group of Mahomedans from the looted village torturing a wretched Hindu youth who had fallen into their hands when slinking home. The details of to-day's doings are detestable." A grim indignation animated him. "And they are my people, damn

'em. I am here to keep their cursed vivacity within bounds. Poor devils."

She appeared antagonistic. She seemed to breathe the voice of doubt and rebellion in his very home. "Why can't they govern themselves!" she said, harshly. "Do you think that we have any moral right to be top-dog in India?"

"Define 'they,'" he retorted quietly. "O, I know you refer to Indians, but are you thinking of those born in this century, or the last, or the one before the last? The history of their relationship to the British Raj is not one and the same, you know. We British came out on top—as you put it—now here, now there, in this land, while generations bred and died. The population of the Punjab to-day were born British subjects: they can claim that as a right. They are the strongest people in India, the most resolute and the most martial, and have as many of their own fighting men under arms within India's frontier as has Great Britain. They own this soil too, which the British soldier here does *not*, so their footing is the firmer. Their politics and passions might become the politics and passions of the majority of the Indian Army, and that's dangerous. But they are not up to tackling the job of governing the remaining three hundred and twenty million Indians. They have not the money, the method, nor the magisterial gift. And they are a divided people, these Punjabis,—as witness to-day's work. That, perhaps, explains our remaining top-dog. As to the nature of our right—it's the right of the man who wins. No, I don't mean merely brutal

conquest—I mean ‘plays the game and wins.’ That’s a moral as well as a physical right. Others compete for the championship to-day as you know full well, but we still hold it.” John Mortimer had seldom made so long a speech. He was distinctly annoyed by her attitude.

His wife’s mind seized upon a vivid memory of an angered Lavretsky, exuberant, picturesque, a torrent of body and soul poured out to sweep her off her feet and carry her with him. How that man had ‘troubled the waters,’—ever a great act. All her being surged with a fearful longing to recall him and his wonderful sway. During that moment the stiffened figure beside her might have been a wooden image for all she cared.

Both were stimulated more than they knew by the elemental passions of earth and humanity with which they had been in so close a conflict. Burning sky and burning woman, deadly men and deadly deeds, by making themselves recognised as realities, acted as reinforcements to the latent strength of their own violent emotions now beginning to wrestle in that strange home, where the wife appeared to accept mere hospitality with a magnificent coldness which by turns enraged and baffled the man’s proud soul.

Suddenly Sara stood up and to John’s eyes at the moment her great height seemed menacing, setting her apart from all that is petty in ordinary women. “O, what’s wrong with this rotten world?” she exclaimed with bitterness.

“A madness of ideals,” said tired John, wearily. “That poor creature was crazed by the religious

belief that a Hindu wife should 'rejoice with her husband's joys, grieve with his sorrows, and cease to exist at his death.' " And he added with grim humour. "It would not suit you."

At that her unexpected laugh went ringing out across the moonlight which fell in a silver torrent through dark leaves and black boughs of trees upon the dusk of the lawn.

"I am *meant* to live," she announced triumphantly. "Even Russia could not kill me."

The velvet night seemed to clothe her in splendour; the stars her tiara, the fierce and tragic plains her formidable retinue.

Sombrely she muttered in a low, awed voice the words, "I have actually survived Lavretsky."

Was she merely startling or truly strong, John asked himself indignantly. If the former he was not going to be made to jump, as by one who fires in the air, whenever she uttered Lavretsky's name. "It's a piece of infernal impertinence," thought Mortimer.

Like a haunting fate there whispered suddenly the dim voice of the Hindu bearer. "Protector of the Poor, a camel sowar has brought this note."

Muffled sounds of a great gaunt beast came uncouthly through the darkness.

Mortimer, after reading the despatch, announced to his wife: "The city is up and at it now as a result of the movement in the villages. I must be off again. The cantonment is full of soldiers and civil lines are piquetted to-night, so you need not be nervous here. I don't know when I shall be back."

There was to be no solving of his marriage problem that night, nor any refuge of quiet sleep. He turned again to his exacting task of maintaining law and order.

And both of them were so built that they sensed a personal romance for him in the strident human cries of defiance and appeal that surged up to the Commissioner of Faujpore. Sara admitted the interest it gave to his aristocratic face and form when he moved out of the garden's shadow into the splash of light on the drive and took the wheel of the motor and command of the situation.

In the sunlight his path had led through bare plains; now in the darkness it led to a tangle of streets, houses, and squeezing walls. The city, large but not great, had none of the passivity of the giant earth; through every door and window it panted its fevered breath, and here and there burning houses sparkled and held angry torches to the incoherent drama of blind mobs that surged and scuffled in the breathless alleys. Women swayed and muttered on the housetops; mysterious men watched and reported and plotted in secret rooms, furious fellows publicly incited, rough rogues looted and burnt. The storm centre was a shrine sacred to the last sati legally committed within the city. It was several generations old and lay in a huddle of courtyards not far from the sweepers' market-place. In that squalid square sweating Punjabi police were hard pressed; sometimes they gained upon the dark swarm opposed to them, sometimes they were on the verge of being overpowered. At one end of the ground, where

a crooked street sneaked off to the shrine, points of lances caught the light of lamps set aloft in a latticed window. From the line of horses and bearded Sikh troopers came a jingling of bit and accoutrement. Man and charger fought the heat and in front of them a group of city magistrates on foot held consultation with the officer, a fair boy called Norman, and the police captain who was a dark lean man in white uniform. Nowhere was there the stolid good humour of northern men in temperate climes dealing with rough crowds. The fiery heat had kindled exasperation in them all, except the subaltern.

Mortimer was very much aware of his own need to reckon with the night's temperature of one hundred and ten degrees, foul with a smell of sweating humanity, cinders, and violated drains. He had also to beware of his lack of sleep and the strain Sara's presence had imposed. His nerves required control while he controlled the city, maddened by religious passions; every vice an opportunist while the angers and prejudices of Hindus and Mahomedans shouted their war cries to the festering night, and the Pax Britannica was defied by all.

The burly police surged back like bulls before a swarm of wasps. Mortimer marked one ghastly bronze face straining upward from the noisy shadows, its eyeballs agleam and its purple lips curled up above white dog teeth that shone like fangs. Not a face that one saw on parade at police inspections, but grown insane with some violent energy; discipline gone from the soul. Thwacks

sounded thickly, and the frantic dance of wicked feet upon hard earth, the yells and shouts of frenzied men. From all the city came confused sounds of tumult. Suddenly there was a roar that seemed to burst ear-drums. A bomb had been flung from the bright window. There was an acrid smell and a crash of five troopers and horses to the ground. Mortimer gave an order and presently young Norman's voice uttered a command and rifle shots rang out sharp and peremptory.

Not in one place only their bitter sound was heard. And, as though the city had waited for an unanswerable order to dismiss argument from its contentious soul, the quarrel broke in panic, in tears, in groans of wounded men. Slowly the cavalry plunged their sweating chargers through flinching crowds to scatter them. Here a sowar pricked a man with his long lance, there one urged shod hoofs towards bare brown feet; none moved so gently forward as the fair boy in command, pale in the gathering dawn.

When Mortimer dismounted from the charger he had borrowed and drove in his motor towards his home he met several meagre processions carrying stiff figures on beds and biers; among them were slim little forms of women murdered by city men in the passions of that cruel night. Some moved to jackal haunted burying grounds and some towards burning ghats, and in each case the living turned to watch with strange looks the passing of their Commissioner.

Sara from her starlit bed had listened to the fierce dispute of the city, and watched its angry fires leap.

With one firm hand pressed against her restless heart she had asked herself if her future lay in the grip of those events. What of Sara Mortimer if death summoned the Commissioner and left her alone with a little pension, a loudly proclaimed name, and a ghastly knowledge of the world?

She heard his motor return and looked down from the edge of the roof upon his tired movements. She realised without tenderness or fear that in spite of wayward years he counted vitally now in her life and fate.

“O, well,” she exclaimed with blunt philosophy, “O, well, he is just one more of them.”

“ For beauty, wit,
High birth, vigour of bone, desert in service,
Love, friendship, charity, are subject all
To envious and calumniating time.”

“ I AM not such a fool as I look,” announced Sara ten days later. She lay upon a fragrant carpet of pine-needles brown as cinnamon. Her linen dress, tinted the blue of forget-me-nots, marked her appreciation of all that adorned her own beauty. “ Not by a long shot.”

Her brother-in-law chuckled. “ Murree does not mistake you for a fool,” he remarked.

She turned on her elbow and looked at him frankly. She liked Digby. “ I am a wonder, you know,” she said.

“ That’s all right,” Digby reassured her.

Nodding gravely at him she continued. “ So most of the women here madden me. Their conception of a huge experience is a proposal, or a baby, or an invitation to a party. When they talk to me and begin to rub in their war work, I could kill them. They assume that they have gone through every sensation that I have known only

more fashionably circumstanced than I. As though I can't gauge how sheltered and protected they've been, even the most enterprising of them. The majority know nothing of public responsibility . . . they can't conceive what it was like for a woman to be one of a government where the penalty of going out of power was imprisonment, with possible torture and probable death. Lord! they prattle of organisation when, in their hands, it generally meant just putting two and two together. And Mrs. Jones said to me complacently, 'I know what Bolshevism is; my brother was in Intelligence at the War Office.' Like knowing all the birds of the air from being acquainted with a person who has eaten a boiled egg,—what?" Her brilliant eyes danced at him.

"Excellent intelligent women! Good wives and mothers. With a vote, too," Digby murmured.

"The Sessions Judge's wife—that Mrs. Jones—is the best joke," she told him. "She thinks my head is swollen. It makes her prance to picture me with the Prime Minister so she tells me her opinion of him—so enlightening, and inspired by Reuter's telegrams. She has spoken three times in a mild debating society of sorts and assures me she knows exactly what I went through addressing those great audiences in London and in the hostile north." With vehement hands she plucked at ferns and moss within reach. "Why, I have had *power*!" She ceased her destructive movements and pressed both hands upon her breast. "It is something within me."

"A modest little flower," Digby commented coolly, but not unkindly, to the hills.

"I *know* I am great," she said with an air of immense sadness. "O, not here in your wretched Murree. I am only notorious here—but in Russia I was great in myself. The Intelligenza realised it—the peasants felt it." She paused a moment and then added with passion, "Lavretsky gloried in it!"

Digby, with his brother John holding his sympathies very forcibly, cut the name of Lavretsky dead.

She broke the silence rather appealingly, "Am I like other women, Digby?"

"You are exactly and precisely like your Mrs. Jones," he told her promptly. "She said to me yesterday, 'I am afraid I am rather strange, Colonel Mortimer, but what amuses most people in Murree does not amuse me. I have led a different life from others, I suppose. London is a very wide sphere when compared with little Murree, you see.' I saw all right."

Sara cried in slow delight, "You have her to the life."

"But I do not say that she looks like you," he remarked.

"That's another thing—plain women have no notion what existence is for beautiful women," Sara announced.

"I suppose men have told you that you are beautiful?" he drawled good humouredly.

"O, I have it on the best authority," she retorted. "You can't snub me, Master Digby. Don't men know when they inspire fear? Don't

I know when I inspire that peculiar admiration which beauty wins? It is a different emotion from any other—there's intelligence in it, and a wish to behold me; not necessarily to touch me, or talk to me, or love me. It makes me feel unique, visible, incarnate, possessing a marvellous Creator. I only express what other good-looking women think, but conceal."

"Famous, great and beautiful," Digby observed cheerfully.

"Yes!" she said with much vigour. "Yes. O, you may flout it, and it is in danger of being cheapened all the time by silly futile people, but it is no lie. I possess fame still, I have beauty now (it must pass, curse it!), and these attributes affect my relations with every creature I meet. That is difficult enough, but the awful difficulty is the mystery to me of my greatness. Sometimes I possess it in my mind and it illuminates everything." She stretched her arms wide to the spaces of hill and sky. "Sometimes I have it in my soul and I am energised to make efforts and sacrifices, and inspire others. Sometimes I have it in my emotions and then—I *suffer!*" Her voice dropped.

"A great egotist?" he challenged.

She winced, but continued. "Sometimes it evaporates—leaves me. Then I have nothing but a mere reputation to live up to,"—she shot a mocking glance at him, "or down to. And then do you know what happens?"

He shook his head.

"I search frantically—frantically, for the

strength of greatness in others," she told him wistfully. "I hunger for it. I need it."

At that with a sense of opportunity the soldier urged, "Look for it in John."

Very gravely she answered, "O, I am a lonely woman, and I expect I always shall be," and he felt she had evaded him.

Her dark grey eyes were no more than vivid slits as she breathed softly through half-parted lips, "You think I am indulging in an orgy of introspection? No. I tell you I am suddenly realising 'the unique quality of self.' Can't you understand a crisis of that sort? *Can't you?*"

He saw instantly that she was honest and became sympathetic. "I see, I see," he reassured her gently. "And existence must be dull enough for you here without excitement, or limelight. I don't mean cheap things," he added hastily.

"It seems to me," she declared, "that a human response whatever form it takes, whether in press-publicity, or the enthusiasm and applause of great audiences, or the recognition of those sitting in the seats of the mighty, or the love of the masses, is the kind of dope that eases the pain of greatness. To be a voice crying in the wilderness is torture." She knit her dark brows. "The truly great go on being themselves, expressing themselves, delivering their message. But without that drug they feel the pangs of their spiritual isolation."

"Better to be an ordinary fellow like me," Digby said lightly.

"Are you ordinary?" her voice was careless. "John is not. Not just ordinary. I should

not have married him in Moscow had he been that. Even though I was only half alive in those old days." She suddenly stood up, slender and straight as a young pine among the delicate spires of the forest firs, and she laughed with irresistible amusement. "You are thinking what an escape that would have been for your John! Well, never mind, Digby, there is this to be said: John is not half as bored by me as he would be by a real wife."

"What do you mean by a real wife, may I ask?" Digby enquired drily, as he rose. He was fearful of intrusion into the privacies of his brother's house, yet this woman kept his human curiosity on tip toe.

"O, your love-honour-and-obey female. Your till-death-us-do-part companion," her manner was reckless. "John's the most moody devil; keen about people one day and bored with them the next."

"You've got a good memory," her brother-in-law remarked significantly.

"I've got an observant eye, and I arrived a fortnight ago," she retorted. "I did not know much about John in the old days, and what I knew I was too young to understand, and there has been plenty to wipe out my impressions since."

"John's memory has been more retentive than yours, then, despite his fickle moods," Digby Mortimer said, walking beside her on the winding road.

She flashed astonishment at him. "Why, he has quite changed!"

"The devil he has! . . . Well, it's possible," thought the soldier, baffled.

"I was rather adorable then, you know," she explained simply. "Youth is a lovely thing."

For a while they moved through a silence only broken by the murmur of woodlands. Then she said, "I can't understand all these attacks on John over the affair in Thadiana and Faujpore."

"The Government has not let him down, has it?" Digby exclaimed.

"Not as far as I know," she answered.

"That is all right, then," he said, relieved. "It is early days, of course. The event is recent. Still, I don't think you need be worried."

"O, I am not worried, I am merely puzzled," said his brother's wife with candour. "It seems strange to me that the seditious press is allowed to represent his actions as ruthlessly brutal."

"Damned lies. It's their game to spread that idea, of course. There will be questions in the House before long, I expect," Digby remarked with scornful amusement.

"I have been with men,—rulers, powerful rulers—when they meant mischief," said Sara, slowly; and she looked away from him across a deep valley. On the far side little villages clung to the slopes of a mighty mountain. "They knew in that hour that they had to intimidate the people, or go under themselves. I have sat with them while they drank a good deal and exulted. The crisis was not a hateful thought to them, not a miserable responsibility. They were like . . . they were like that great bird of prey, there—*swoop!*" She pointed to a

vulture soaring across the vast space below their path.

"Cruel brutes," the Englishman said tersely.

"Not always." She shook her head. "Warm hearted at times. They had to think fiercely in order to act fiercely. Had they seen the fears and pain they inflicted they might have been pitiful. But they were in peril, and they meant to save their skins. They *liked* winning through. Scruples did not trouble them. Now John was with me the evening of that rising in the city and he was not in the least like the men I mean. Do you suppose I can't gauge the difference?"

"Accurately," Digby conceded.

"And yet the people are allowed to hear misrepresentations of him." She scornfully shrugged her angry shoulders. "That's not the way to govern ignorant masses."

"It is the way we seem to do it," he murmured with philosophy.

"Which is the type of thing John says," Sara complained. "Men like you Mortimers don't evade the event, but do evade the issue. And, look here, *what about me?*"

He greatly enjoyed the keen edge of her voice, fresh as a wind; the grace of her buoyant movements, the surprise of her intensely personal approach.

"But where does Sara Mortimer come in? John's the Commissioner here," he retorted lazily.

"Suppose John is kicked out of his job or other-

wise damned to pacify the Extremists? That affects me now. Suppose there's a real bloody rebellion out here and I'm caught in it? That affects me too. I have seen enough nasty messes; I don't wish to see any more, thank you."

"O, this will blow over," Digby assured her.

She stopped abruptly and looked through the vast symmetrical maze of dark forest trees falling into shadowed villages. From a road below their path rose a musical jingle of mule bells. Echoing through the woods came sharp blows of a woodman's axe. And there stole past them,—the very spirit incarnate of these primeval hills,—a squat coolie, brown of skin and clad in brown, who stooped beneath a heavy load. His hairy arms and legs were gnarled and bent as boughs of trees. He smelt like some wild beast of the mountains.

"Do you *feel* it all? The sights, sounds and scents?" Sara demanded. "Forcible, aren't they? And on the grand scale. You can't coax the atmosphere of a place such as this into a miniature compass, an office, or Council Chamber! I love it. It vibrates a deep response in me, as though a huge drum sounded. Well, in ten minutes we shall come to the tennis courts and everybody running about after a ball, in complete contrast to this giant stillness and simplicity. I feel as though I had been living and moving in huge Russia among the elemental things of human nature and had suddenly come among a set of people who play political tennis. Official competing with official to keep vivacious balls of files on the move. While all the time forces are gathering

around them that mean earthquake, avalanche, thunder."

"O, things are undoubtedly serious," Digby agreed, "only we don't become romantic and eloquent about the situation. Not imaginative enough. And I think the worst is over."

Sara was exasperated. "I wonder you don't make the deaf and dumb your rulers. They have the qualifications you emulate with your stolid attitude. Such inert superiority! Meanwhile agitators get away with the goods."

"It is not my job to think politically," said the soldier calmly. "I might curse old John for not preventing that sati as it has touched up Hindu and Mahomedan feeling among my men, but I know old John couldn't help it. Human beings are devilish difficult goods to handle. You can destroy, but can't manufacture to order. The machinery is not invented that can turn out two alike. In my humble opinion the Army handles men best out here, judging by results. But it can't tackle women and they are at the bottom of half the trouble. You, Sara, are an agitator if ever there was one!" and he laughed.

"Go your own way, you men," said Sara sombrely. She burst out, as they approached the Commissioner's house, "I wish I were an artist—author, musician, sculptor! But I can't express myself in any of those ways. I am a speaker, but what is the good of that here? If I had an appointment I could fling myself heart and soul into the job. Life is now—a blank—*nothing!*"

Impatient of these strenuous desires Digby sug-

gested with less tolerance than he had shown hitherto, "Why not content yourself with an ordinary life of pleasant ways and intercourse for a time? The people of this country are morbid, but we British are not. There's a lot to be said for leisure and sheer *joie de vivre*. Work is necessary exercise, but you can over do it and lose a sense of proportion."

She flashed a dark glance at him. "But I need to forget. I need to forget myself—and much beside. I cannot do so by talking to Mrs. Thingnabob and Mrs. Tomnoddy. That bores me, I tell you. There might be distraction if I plunged into some emotional episode, but under the circumstances that would not be playing the game by John." She sighed.

"Well, well," murmured Digby, and he thought, "I am glad she draws the line somewhere."

They parted by the cosmos at the edge of her garden. It blew its blossoms lightly in the air like myriad hovering butterflies. All around were similar gardens climbing the steep hillside and half buried in deep woods. Digby observed that Sara looked very much a stranger within the gate as she passed the mali and the chaprassee and the bearer, unable to speak a word of their language. Aloof in her whiteness, her mystery, her outcry.

He pondered over their conversation while he walked on alone to the tennis courts. Not till to-day had he quite realised Sara's personality and never before had the problem of his brother's marriage so strongly intrigued him. Digby Mortimer had

a discernment for the emotions of men and women just as some men have an ear for music. Said he, to himself, "I can see that she has a difficult game to play if she is not to run amok from the too great stimulant of her personal adventures. She is not just a conceited ass. I believe she is watching John and political developments here like a cat, waiting and hoping for some affinity. Lavretsky evidently meant everything to her at one time. Russia still obsesses her. Here she has something of the feeling the Ritz used to give me when on leave from the Ypres salient. As powers she regards John and the rest of us as second-rate, I suppose. A diplomatist reduced to the rank of representative at Sofia after being ambassador in Paris might experience the same flatness. I don't envy John his job with her." Then, because he suddenly realized his very keen desire to discuss Sara, he rejected his intention of watching tennis and turned his steps towards the General's house, hoping to find there the congenial society of that officer's wife.

Mrs. Hough was one of those people who invite nicknames. She was known as The White Man's Burden from the simple fact that she cannot have weighed less than thirteen stone. "They all roll, but they all gather moss," she chuckled serenely. "You don't catch me polishing my corners; I hate friction. I just waddle along and find the softest spots." Her smooth pale face was innocent of lines and she ardently recommended her favourite face-cream to the weather-beaten. A shrewd, humorous, alert mind and a temperament free from the tyranny of exposed nerves made her excellent com-

pany. She greeted Digby from a comfortable cushioned chair on her luxurious verandah. Mrs. Hough thoroughly enjoyed him. "He has the right sort of good-looks and a *chic* popularity. He knows that the noblest study of mankind is man and is a renowned regimental officer, but he has discovered that much the funniest study is woman and so he appreciates me," she declared.

"I have been spending the afternoon with that sister-in-law of mine," he told her.

"Don't compare us!" Mrs. Hough screamed. "It's not fair. She is so lovely and I am perfectly respectable."

"How do you know she is not 'respectable' too?" Mortimer asked in his light friendly way with amused eyebrows.

"So unnecessary for her," said Mrs. Hough firmly. "Russia has not cared two hoots for that kind of thing since it went to the dogs. I admire her frightfully, but people say she is a Bolshevist agent."

"Why?" demanded Digby coolly.

"Something seditious that she said started the idea. It is a lively notion so we all cherish it. Your brother looks ill."

"Do you think she poisons his food?" he enquired drily.

"Perhaps he regrets having taken her back . . . and yet, of course, in London people praised her up tremendously. Jasmine Jones says the Cabinet were all taken in." Mrs. Hough shook with laughter. "I am so sick of hearing our Jasmine describe what happened when she got her

precious O.B.E. that it is simply heaven to be able to rub in the famous doings of Mrs. Mortimer. But I am sorry for your brother, somehow."

Nearly everyone has learnt on some startling occasion how foreign their own family affairs sound when discussed by acquaintances. Mortimer found he disliked the experience, and sat silent while Mrs. Hough chuckled on.

"She has a drastic tongue, you know. There were a lot of us talking and Mrs. Todworth passed with her latest adorer, young Darcy. I grant you he is ten years her junior and looks it. Jasmine said in very proper tones to your sister-in-law: 'That sort of thing does so much harm out here. They say her husband means to obtain a separation, if not worse'; and Mrs. Mortimer indicated the Darcy boy with a gesture and said: 'Well she has got the custody of the child whatever happens.' It was *the way* she said it. Wretched Mrs. Todworth has looked the age of Methuselah since someone kindly repeated that to her." She broke off and questioned her guest shrewdly. "Do you like your sister-in-law? Are you nice to her?"

"Exceedingly," he replied.

"I am glad," said Mrs. Hough sincerely.

Digby observed his family very closely that night, his insight rendered more acute by his intimate talk with Sara and Mrs. Hough's gossip. The Commissioner and his wife were entertaining and it was a somewhat formal dinner party. John certainly looked ill and exerted himself but little. When his wife took the initiative in conversation he listened but kept his own counsel. Sara incarnated

a spirit that was mysterious. In her strange presence social animation seemed to pine away as frolic fails in the vicinity of fear. The guests appeared uncertain rather than bored. Digby felt that they would discuss the event keenly by and by.

Digby was irresistibly impelled to take upon himself the task of making the thing go. He had a social gift and the atmosphere changed to one of gaiety for a time. But his own interest centred round Sara, dressed in gleaming gold, and gradually the attention of all the guests reverted to her, silent though she was.

Presently some chance remark stirred her and she spoke with the force of a wave discharged upon the beach. "I'd hang those Londoners who, living in a city of seven million human beings, have the insolence to put up threatening notices over their area-doors—'Beware of the dog.' You don't print such words for cats to read. If you have a dog let him beware of human beings, I say. O, I know it is an old traditional warning, but every insult's old."

"I sometimes wish I could think of a new one," said Major Dearlove, a staff officer of much experience and sense of humour. He sat on Sara's left and she greeted his robust remark with welcoming eyes.

Little Mrs. Dearlove, beside Digby in a very discreet dress, sought for convictions in each face at the table and finding only a careless curiosity said very pacifically, "I am so *fond* of dogs. Don't you care for dogs, Mrs. Mortimer?"

Her hostess replied with indolent patience, "O,

yes, tremendously," and added, " but not bloodhounds, and not to eat."

To which Mrs. Dearlove murmured, aghast, " I have never had any."

" ' Fee, fi, fo, fum, I smell the blood of an Englishman,' " teased Digby, and he was amazed when his sister-in-law cried, " *Don't*, Digby! " as one whose genuine horror has been flouted.

" H'm. Our Sara must learn to keep her memories in better order. These outbreaks of hers are somewhat disconcerting," thought the soldier. He turned his attention to Mrs. Dearlove who, trained by a socially aspiring mother, would have made conversation without guide, overseer, or ruler, more industrious than any ant. She chirped busily, " Have you ever *seen* bloodhounds work, Colonel Mortimer? "

Once more the commonplace asserted itself. A look of supreme boredom settled upon the face of John Mortimer. Lightly uttered remarks played round the announcement of a subaltern's engagement to a widow. Sara spoke from a little cloud of cigarette smoke. " I received dozens of proposals when I was a widow."

Mrs. Dearlove's face flew such bewildered signals of distress that Digby admitted in a soothing murmur, " Yes, quite difficult to follow, isn't she? "

" *Before* your brother? " she fretted, and regarded that splendid form as though a ghost, or a bigamist, had been revealed.

Something—a direct personal challenge across the table, possibly—had greatly enlivened the Com-

missioner. "When my successor, the late lamented Demitriadi, perished?" he asked, cheerfully.

"When I killed him, you know," Sara replied and continued to address John, her elbows on the table, "having created him."

"He was a happy thought," her husband commented. "Did you fashion him after my likeness? Such imitation would be the sincerest flattery, of course."

"O, no. Variety added a spice for me. I made him out to have been a most awful brute. And I had to describe him over and over again until I grew sick of my mental sight of him. I always said that he had large purple ears with big tufts of white hair in them." Her mocking mirth rang out in startling gaiety.

"And were your rejected suitors very desperate characters, Mrs. Mortimer?" Major Dearlove asked. His amused air masked a keen enquiry.

Sara shrugged her white shoulders. "Here to-day and gone to-morrow," she admitted.

Mrs. Dearlove pattered in a shocked word. "Not men who would make good husbands, I should imagine. I have always heard that Russians are so very——" she hesitated.

"Passionate," Sara supplied the statement in her tingling voice.

"Demitriadi now,—that's the ideal husband," John Mortimer growled. "Made to order by his wife, ears and all."

"You professed the reluctance of those once bit twice shy, I presume?" Major Dearlove persisted

to the satisfaction of other guests, who found in the conversation much that enabled them to observe the *vie intime* of those ceaselessly discussed persons the Mortimers.

“Emphatically,” Sara nodded. Then, in pursuit of her unconquerable memories, she continued: “I used to say, ‘My God! After being Demitriadi’s wife I hold the whole thing in horror.’” The dramatic way in which she threw her eyes up and her lovely head back,—showing the perfect stem of her throat,—and the repudiating gesture of her hands, demonstrated the spirited manner in which she had played her isolated and dangerous game. Repeating the phrase in Russian she brought the reality of such foreign scenes vividly before them all. Her husband, whose honour no less than her own had been staked, was quite unflinching. The grim and daring humour of her invention struck hard at the imagination of all the men, while their speculating eyes beheld this woman whose attractions had invited ruin.

“But,” objected Mrs. Dearlove, “I should have thought it would have been safer to say that Mr. Demitriadi had been a good man, and that you *still* loved him. When all those Russians bothered you they possibly said to themselves that they were quite justified in urging you to forget a bad husband. Whereas grief and love are so sacred, I think.”

“I would not trade on an assumed grief and love for worlds. That would terrify me,” Sara explained with the grave simplicity of a child.

Digby’s thoughts applauded. “At any rate

there is nothing tawdry about her," he decided with relief.

Mrs. Dearlove's content was but brief. The very next morning she gave her breathless account of the conversation to Mrs. Jones, who pronounced an influential and shattering criticism. "You did not understand her. Don't imagine they proposed marriage. Some may have done so, but not all. Not under the circumstances. In Russia. With that sort of revolution going on. And that kind of woman, too. I wonder why she gave herself away. Perhaps she thinks it does not matter, when everyone knows the Lavretsky story. Mr. Mortimer is a fool to permit it."

When Sara made the move to the drawing-room conversation among the men became political. How to handle sedition wisely was discussed the more searchingly that each officer and official was aware of the attack being launched against the methods which the Commissioner had employed to suppress disorder in Faujpore. Their success had disconcerted the leaders of rebellion to such an extent that calumny had to be used by them in order to misrepresent facts to an awed population in India and an ignorant public elsewhere.

When they rejoined the women John Mortimer did his duty as host in a manner highly alarming to Mrs. Dearlove. His polite concentration of attention upon her prattle did not disguise the formidable weariness which consumed him. This was the more tantalising to her that her own Reginald Peter Dearlove was obviously absorbed in Sara's low voiced remarks which she could not catch.

“ Surely she cannot look as she does this moment and not have some wonderful stuff in her,” Digby mused. “ I believe that at present she is incapable of going forward a step with John. She stands among us calling heaven and earth to witness the abomination of desolation which she has seen. He’ll have to give her time.” But, when the guests took their departure, Digby grew conscious of John’s desperate impatience and unrest as golden-clad Sara came towards them, a shining vitality, and said, “ Good-night, Digby. Good-night, John.” Then she left them.

Thus the brothers were alone together as on that July night in Faujpore when they had faced the position in which John found himself. Then the Commissioner had been frank, now his colossal pride held him dumb. Yet Digby lingered and helped himself to an unwanted whiskey and soda as a pretext for delay. “ I shan’t get anything out of him while he is in this mood,” he thought, “ but I’ll give him a chance.” Aloud he said, “ Sara and I had a great talk this afternoon.”

“ About Russia,” John snorted.

“ Partly. She seemed concerned at this attack on you over the sati business.”

A rather wistful look dawned and died in John’s eyes. “ O, yes,” he said gruffly; “ she thinks I’m a fool to stand it. Pity I can’t make her Commissioner, eh? She’d not make quite as good a Deputy Commissioner as Ali Khan, though.”

“ He’s in Faujpore now? ”

“ Yes. He was on leave—‘ urgent private affairs ’—when the trouble broke out. Marrying

his third or fourth wife, I believe. He draws big pay, you see. I can't imagine how they manage their shows, those fellows. One wife is one too many for me."

"Not in the long run," Digby suggested loyally, with cautious eyes on his brother's drawn face.

"Private affairs are apt to be *urgent*. Now, or never," the other said, curtly. Then he changed the subject. "Prestbury has wired that he wants me to put him up on his way from Kashmir to Simla."

Pip Prestbury, then travelling in the East, was a merry egoist with political ambitions, who had succeeded to the peerage bestowed upon his father for making money out of a national necessity for munitions of war. His wealth enabled him to indulge in the big game shooting that was Digby Mortimer's idea of bliss. His younger brother owned two influential newspapers and Prestbury had once or twice animated his audience when speaking in the House of Lords. He was a knave of hearts; quite without scruple, hesitation or anxiety. Digby instantly mistrusted the prospect of Sara being thrown with him. "Damned if I like it," thought he, disconcerted.

"I rather want to discuss the Faujapore business with Pip as he is going to Viceregal Lodge," the Commissioner continued gravely. "He may be able to rub facts into them there. And he sails for home next month where his brother's papers can tell the public the truth. That would be all to the good. He'll arrive here to-morrow."

The big issues could not be ignored. For all the

touch of devil-may-care disdain in John Mortimer's aspect that tenacious man certainly was not heedless of them. Observant of this Digby asked, as though he but lightly enquired, "*Can you put him up?*"

"There is a second spare-room," answered John, grimly.

At that Digby took his departure. As he went out into the night to mount his pony he said over his shoulder very gently and persuasively—"That spare-room business is all rot, old man."

John Mortimer received the remark in stony silence.

“ For he’s no man on whom perfections wait
That, knowing sin within, will touch the gate.”

“ SHALL I like your Lord Prestbury? ” demanded Sara of her husband next day.

“ Women make a great fuss about him,” replied John.

“ Then I expect he’s a fool,” she remarked.

“ He’s not that,” Mortimer said tersely, and then asked her, “ How are you getting on with the language? ”

Sara, who had insisted upon studying with a munshi, replied with her inimitable swagger, “ Splendidly.”

“ Az to bar-gīram o dil bā digare yār kunam? Ai ba-farmān-i-to sad dil! Man o īnkār kunam? ”* said Mortimer. “ Good. You don’t understand a word of that.”

Unabashed she smiled her peculiarly sweet smile at him. “ Not yet. I’ll go one better presently.” Then she leant across the writing table, the palms of her hands set upon the files that were piled there.

* “ Shall I take my heart from thee and bestow it on another? O thou, at whose disposal are a thousand hearts, am I capable of such an act? ”

“ John, what on earth is your notion of the thing I should do with my life now? ”

Her question took him aback. What was he offering her? The position the spare-room afforded. As regards any personal ambitions of her own he could think of no way in which she might develop them without becoming a nuisance to the Government of the Punjab. Nevertheless a sense of fair play, an ingrained preference for giving any plucky creature a sporting chance, impelled him to reply with his slow air of authority and good humour: “ My notion is that you should have a festive time—be happy. There are no rules as to how to be happy.”

“ ‘ How to be happy, though married? ’ ” she quoted, immovable; her tone a provocation.

“ Ah,” growled he, his eyes steadily fixed upon her face. “ That’s your handicap.”

She disconcerted him not a little by asking abruptly, “ And how old are you? ”

“ Forty-one,” he announced in disgust.

“ I thought so,” Sara said darkly, and turned away.

When she reached the drawing-room she flung herself down in one of its big chintz covered arm-chairs and thought hard. In her maze of reflections she attempted to find where she stood. The large, costly, formal room around her made an impressive landmark and her deliberations drifted towards it from the little sitting-room in Ealing with its many miniatures of uniformed Whites: admirals, generals, captains, and cadets. They passed in review the sombre splendour of merchants’ palaces

in Moscow before the war, and the gilded discomfort of her honeymoon's hotels. They paused in ghastly hospitals, which grew ever more gruesome as they deteriorated. They pondered over a picture of blank prison walls. As though looking down a telescope they recognised again the long narrow trains in which Commissar Lavretsky and his staff lived and moved. And she saw once more the filth accumulated where trains halted on sidings. There were visions, too, of shattered rooms eloquent of homes destroyed and demoralised populations. Such visions guided her without further wandering to her first clearly defined conclusion, "I would have been a fool to chuck *this* away."

She refused to dwell upon a picture of Lavretsky shot by a half-crazy Pole as he stepped from the train at Boulogne. But in her very shirking she sensed again the anguish in that moment of destiny. And she ached for the unbearable pathos of the long European journey during which he had been tormented by evidence of how far better off were the people who had escaped his experimental hand. Until the moment of his death no resolve as to her own course had claimed immediate action from her. Certainly she had told Mr. Crumbles of her intention to declare her real name and identity after affairs of state had been settled in London and she could "risk upsetting Lavretsky." But in her soul she knew that she had held that respectable resolution as a gambler intends to desist from gambling after he has seen the result of the next throw of the dice still rattling in the box. Anything might have happened had Lavretsky lived.

What did happen was that Lavretsky died and, dazed beyond despair, she stood up above his huddled form and cried impatiently to the official who addressed her, "Don't call me Madame Demetriadi—I am really Mrs. Mortimer, an Englishwoman. Where is the British Consul? I want the British Consul." For the time she was a shattered creature. Afterwards political excitement had drugged her. She did not sit and mope. Four months in a Moscow prison had given her all the opportunity to brood that she was ever likely to demand from life. In London she had learnt of the deaths of her grandmother and aunt. The Ealing chapter was closed. Mortimer remained.

"Time is a powerful workman," Sara said to herself in her Murree bungalow. "I was longer with Lavretsky than any other human being I have known during the last seven years. I can't wipe him out in twelve weeks. I wonder what made John stick to me. It certainly impressed me when old Crumbles told me. I think *that* decided me to risk it and rejoin him here. I am no good at settling things by letter and something had to be settled." Her past self eluded her, dissatisfied her. She had ideals for Sara Mortimer.

She remembered demanding of her cousin Gertrude Hall: "Women have got the vote, so what is the law of *divorce* now?" After much irrelevance that jolly spinster had admitted, "Well, Sara, I don't quite know what you are driving at, but if you want to divorce your husband you *can't*, for you would have to prove cruelty or desertion. In addition to the other thing, you

know. Cruel he had no chance to be, and you deserted him,—in a way.”

“No divorce. Then I’ll be up and off to India,” Sara had announced with a flicker of a smile on her lips. Perhaps she was conscious that in England she had been a nine days’ wonder and the tenth day was dawning.

She rose and began to pace up and down. “John is a riddle to me,” she grumbled to herself. “I feared I should have to keep him at arm’s length—I can’t forget Lavretsky yet, I can’t!—and here he is, a polite friend. There must be somebody else with him too.” She frowned. “Shall I ask him? Not yet. I can’t blame him . . .”

The woman was perturbed. “Some memories and emotions abide with us like a fever which, persisting, works havoc and change in all our fabric. Day by day and hour by hour we develop.” She stood still with her hands clenched, her arms rigid by her sides, her head flung high. “Not yet. I’ll wait. I am not steady yet. At this moment I can’t face difficulties, or physical hardships. But later I’ll go my own way and I’ll live my life my own way. Splendidly if I can, strangely if I must.”

A sound of coolies carrying luggage up from the motor road and thumping their loads down on the verandah drew her to the open French window, and there, immaculately clad, among the brown and gnome-like hillmen stood Pip Prestbury.

He was a sandy, finely-cut, active man of about thirty-six. His hazel eyes danced in his keen freckled face on which his slight moustache did not

conceal the flexible lines of his small mouth. It was a smooth bold countenance which gave the impression of having an answer ready for any challenge. As he advanced to greet his hostess the thought 'he wants to be liked,' flashed across Sara's mind, and she instantly liked him.

She remained appreciative while he expended cash and humour freely on the coolies. "Quite a decent lot of monkeys spoilt," he said to her with a sweep of his hand towards them. "I say, this nobleman's rather a dandy, what?" He looked, not without compassion, at a ragged, hairy old man. "Here's an extra rupee to spend on soap, my lad. Don't overdo it." Then he greeted Kalyan Das with a gay enthusiasm. "Hullo, old Puss-in-Boots, how are you? 'Achcha,' that is the word, isn't it? 'Teek and achcha,' eh? What a lingo!"

The mild and aged face fringed by white hair wrinkled into smiles. This laughing open-handed Sahib was a great favourite with the bearer. "By the kindness of the Presence all is well," he replied with venerable dignity in the vernacular.

"I am your father and mother, am I not?" said Prestbury. "That's a nice responsibility. Do you candidly think the brightest jewel in the British crown makes it worth my while? Not a non-co-operator yet, are you? Then let me have a wash before I take all this dust into the Lady-Sahib's drawing-room. Thanks."

Sara heard his gay voice go down the passage, then an ejaculation. "Hullo! This is all wrong. That's not my hat on the bed. Where the devil are

you letting me wander, Pussy? Why don't you take care of me? The Lady-Sahib's room? Well, it was mine once. John—— John—— O, there you are. As a married man keep me out of mischief, will you? Pussy is leading me astray. How are you, old fellow? Been slaughtering in Faupore again? You beat Nadir Shah by all accounts. We must have a great yarn about all that." When the voices died away Sara felt that something reckless, enticing, irresponsible had invaded the bungalow.

While the evening sun glowed sombrely over darkening firs and for a brief hour fragile snows traced their frosts against the windows of heaven, Sara Mortimer sat solitary in the cold still air of her verandah. She had not seen her guest again since he had stood like a racehorse, all speed and breeding, among dark shaggy highland cattle who were but beasts of burden. Since then he had remained in the Commissioner's office, and the woman, restless, found herself excluded as she had never been by Dmitri Lavretsky. That bleak hour created in her a determination to make herself felt. To ignore Sara was to starve her and when encountered she was fierce with her craving.

It was an angrily unconventional woman, but expressively handsome in dress and grooming, who sat at the head of John Mortimer's table that night. She wondered of whom their guest reminded her; a flitting provoking resemblance.

"I am dreadfully nervous," Prestbury announced. "It is years since I found myself beside a celebrity. Such an event is all right at the Guild-

hall where people make set speeches, but here it upsets me so frightfully that I have spilt the salt. Now then, John, you tell me—what ought I to do? I don't like to ask your wife straight out."

"I should behave like an ordinary human being," said John, grimly.

"Don't be absurd. That's really too ridiculous. An ordinary human being straight from the wilds begins to make love at once. Of course that would be all right for you,—in your privileged position. But I want to make a good impression on Mrs. Mortimer."

Sara raised her heavy eyelids and gave Prestbury a slow glance, but remained silent.

"Any impression would be better than none. At present I cut no ice at all," Prestbury continued undaunted.

For a moment her determinedly cold eyes withheld the glint of a smile.

"I suppose I ought to try to come up to the scratch as a celebrity myself," he rattled on. "Then Greek could meet Greek on sociable terms. But I am afraid that is beyond me. A *cause célèbre* now? Would that help? It is about my form."

Mortimer gave a chuckle, but Sara maintained her silence which by its completeness kept the atmosphere unbearably tense.

"Family feeling backs the *cause célèbre* stunt," said the undismayed guest. "It would make good copy for that brother of mine. Infernal fellow, isn't he? Two papers. He talks out of the back of his neck as well as with his mouth I tell him."

He adroitly dropped further personal allusions to his hostess, but her rebuff had put him on his mettle so that he laid himself out to entertain Mortimer whose broad shoulders shook with laughter. Yet neither man could shake off a sharp consciousness of Sara's penetrating presence.

"She has got the very devil of a temperament," her husband noted. It disconcerted him that Sara should be ungracious to a man who had just undertaken to advocate his side of the Faujpore controversy.

Both the men were startled when she suddenly exclaimed to Prestbury with all the effect of sunshine breaking out of thunderclouds, "Now I know of whom you remind me! Madame Lavretsky."

It was then, for the first time, that Mortimer knew with certainty that the Russian had been a married man.

Prestbury, assuming the air of an amazed child, turned a blandly innocent face from husband to wife. "Poor dear woman. What is there about me that specially recalls her appearance to you? My saintly expression, I trust. Not the way the Kashmir barber cut my hair, is it? A bit bobbed of course. Perhaps it is my moustache,—with those foreign ladies one never knows. Unfortunate Lavretsky!"

John had never disliked the name more than on Prestbury's lips.

"I assure you I am dreadfully unladylike," Pip told Sara, and at that some harsh mirth in her mind overflowed in sudden laughter.

"So was Madame Lavretsky," she announced.

“ And, in spite of her unprepossessing looks, did her husband like her? ” Prestbury enquired.

Mortimer turned into a hot rage of which he gave no sign.

“ He liked her now and then,” Sara replied.

“ ‘ Now and then,’ ” Prestbury echoed and his light brown eyes looked straight into her clear ones and investigated their darkness boldly. “ How well you understand us men. You simply terrify me, Mrs. Mortimer.”

“ Lavretsky was frightened of *her*,” said Sara. “ She was Georgovik’s sister and Georgovik has awful power still.” Then, abruptly, as though by introducing the subject she had intolerably jarred her own nerves, Sara made the move.

Left alone with his guest, the Commissioner, strung taut for another effort, resolutely began a discussion on sport to which Pip instantly responded with lip service while his mind played round the rumour of Sara as Lavretsky’s influential mistress, and the drama of her presence in Murree as Mortimer’s wife. John savagely guessed his pre-occupation.

Later the men discovered a change in Sara who had become intimately gracious. Nevertheless she kept Mortimer’s temper stoked to white heat. Since her arrival in Faujapore she had seemed to him to be forever feeling and thinking as one who struggles in a crisis with big events. She ignored the stream of daily life around her. John felt crazed to vanquish and overcome her alliance with a hidden past and far blood-stained horizons. He wanted that tantalizing beauty and vital earnest-

ness of her to be loving. He desired her tenderness. He wished her passionate interest to be given not to problems of struggling politicians but to him. Yet his thoughts concerning her were neither humble nor gentle; he was frequently profoundly hostile with the feud of one fascinated and tormented. He, like many another, had been a bridegroom estranged from his bride by war. But he had stood to that relationship while the world rocked beneath their feet, for honour and dishonour were fixed for him like the north and south poles. He had held himself bound in common decency to offer her the protection of his roof and name since he had been unable to rescue her from Russia's marauding manhood. There he halted, and would neither advance to the surrender of his pride, nor go back from the terms of peace implied by his hospitality. He was reluctant to question her, since to do so was to demand a passport after he had permitted her to cross the frontier into his home unchallenged. In acting thus he sturdily maintained the standard of conduct he judged honourable. But from his wife's honour his character with its ideals and passions made as imperious demands. He argued that a victim's innocence would find expression in a declaration of its tragedy; that it would recognise truth and frankness as essential between husband and wife. Mortimer also told himself that Sara might hesitate as to the hour in which to reveal the truth; that sensitiveness could impose a tyranny of reserve which only the sudden inspiration of the right word, the right moment, would be strong

enough to overcome. He calmed himself for nights together by assuming a conviction,—which was not deep, instinctive, nor strong,—that his wife was struggling with an imprisoning dumbness on a subject of vital calamity. As the days passed this hope grew ever less and less for those lips of hers opened again and again upon the name of Lavretsky. Sometimes, for a brief space, he believed the sinister rumours utterly a lie. A freedom in her, as one who had been always mistress of her fate, conveyed to him that amazing assurance. He lost again that faith and held her a culprit when her coldness to himself showed unmistakably clear, and her look, speech, or gesture betrayed some tumult of feeling that surged within her at the touch of memory. The secrecy of the woman, and the witchery she had for him, steadily convinced him of real treachery. Thus his guard over himself never relaxed and his humiliation increased.

The presence of Prestbury stirred him to uneasiness, for suspicion was now ever alert in his mind. Pip's quick brain had discerned where Sara Mortimer's emotional interest lay and he would not let the subject of Russia alone. Stimulated by his keen enquiry Sara talked on far into the night while their guest showed himself greatly impressed. Something of the powers that had made her an influence among astute and scheming officials and rulers—visionaries, boasters, opportunists, and idealists—manifested themselves as she spoke. Essentials were revealed to that adventurous mind of hers and she could keep steadfastly to the point. She never missed the dramatic element. She could

create it with a phrase. She could infuse it into this or that aspect of administration. And the things which men seek—law, order, wealth, victory, dominion—gained attraction from the strangely arresting quality of her voice and the strength of her own imagination when speaking of such things.

She laid down no intolerant law. While her scoffing tongue disclosed theory, fallacy, effort and failure she appeared to retain a measure of consideration for each human being. "He was a callous brute," she would say, "but then he had seen his old mother tortured. He was a bit mad, you know, and he knew a lot about birds." Or, "Well, that man was so young, and only fifteen when he went to the Front. It is intoxicating to attain supreme local power at twenty-one. Passing competitive examinations into the bottom level of a civil service would not have given him half as much immediate satisfaction. He ranted, but he was really fearless." Again she would shrug her expressive shoulders and declare, "Just a self-deluded agitator. He could not lead. He was able to incite, but not to control." With a weary gravity she said after pronouncing a well-known name: "He has terrific energy, and Russians are so lazy. A fanatical man, whose strange ideals are magnetic. His sincerity is deep and his will as durable as his egotism. His personal conduct is serene; his orders are cruel, criminal and contaminating."

She saw that the two Englishmen gave greatest attention to her revelations of famine, pestilence and bribery. "Why do those things most impress

you? ” she demanded, her chin on her hand and her elbow resting on her thin knee.

“ Because there, but for the British Raj, goes India to-morrow,” said Mortimer.

“ If those ungrateful people could only realise which side their bread is buttered ! ” ejaculated Prestbury.

The Commissioner snorted. “ Dry bread. In my division the villagers gave their manhood to every Front. They house widows and wounded to-day, and receive back a demobilised rank and file. Calamity and swagger jostle and jar. Three years ago a pestilence swept over them killing one in twenty. Famine, scarcity, and high prices have made prosperity an impossible craving. Many of their petty officials twist their tails for bribes. And all that combines to form a local atmosphere among illiterate rustics in which it is easy to create a mirage of desire. Agitators find little difficulty in leading the ignorant towards mere visionary goals.”

“ People often tried to bribe me,” announced irrepressible Sara.

“ Lucky lady ! ” cried Prestbury.

“ I couldn’t,—somehow,” she said, with transparent truth.

“ Lavretsky——? ” Pip began, but she interrupted him quickly, saying, “ No, but Madame Lavretsky did. She adored jewels.”

“ What did you mind most, Sara? ” John asked.

The question arrested her. In a flash she perceived that he had seldom put one to her. She answered with conviction and without hesitation : “ The filth.”

Having said that she rose and stood before them, the very incarnation of beauty and daintiness. "It was everywhere; in wounds, in beds, in persons, in hospitals, in streets. Wherever Russian multitudes halted or treked. The degradation and the ugliness!"

Sara moved to the door then, having forgotten to utter a conventional 'Good-night.' With her hand on the latch she said in her lovely voice: "And I am not musical. Through everything the Russians sing. It is like an enchantment. But not for me. I experienced it all unbewitched. For me there was no beauty anywhere unless I could reach the clean country." Then she went out.

Digby Mortimer turned up next morning to see how they were all getting on. He found exactly what he had expected. Sara and Prestbury sat in close confidential talk on the verandah. Scarlet and yellow dahlias nodded heavy heads around them and mists came shuddering through dim forests. The feeble monsoon was dying wraith-like among the mountains and a fitful September sun drew sudden blades of light from every pine needle.

Prestbury, vigorous for adventure, was pursuing Sara's emotions under the guise of homage to her fame and sympathy with her political passions. After the men had greeted each other with more cordiality than they felt, Prestbury said, "I am trying to persuade Mrs. Mortimer that she must visit Simla. I have been immensely interested in all that she has told me. I feel very strongly indeed that the Viceroy ought to be given the

opportunity of hearing it at first hand. Lady Birmingham would be only too glad to invite Mrs. Mortimer to stay at Viceregal Lodge if I may tell Her Ex. that the invitation will be accepted. It would be a command, really. Back me up, Digby."

"Care to go, Sara?" asked the soldier nonchalantly.

"In a way," she replied, slowly. "It is exasperating to carry my cargo and have nowhere to unload it. Much that I know will be out of date presently."

"Quite, quite," Digby nodded without enthusiasm. "But I fancy the Viceroy has pretty good information."

"Documentary," Prestbury declared with terse contempt. "Now, Mrs. Mortimer is a living inspiration."

While Sara stood hesitating between the pair, her eyes very bright, her husband loomed round the corner of the verandah from his office. He held an official envelope and, after a wave of his pipe in greeting to Digby, he sat gloomily on the railing. A great cloud came crouching up, shrouding forest and mountain.

"I have heard from the Powers," he announced, taking the three calmly into his confidence. "They won't prosecute Chunder Bōse and they won't forbid him to re-enter the Punjab."

"You urged them to do so?" Digby said.

"Of course. I put it strongly." John struck the table with the stem of his pipe to emphasise his words as he continued: "It is against their policy

of conciliation. They do not wish to arouse latent religious excitement by his trial and precipitate a possible rising. So they will go on making speeches; everybody on both sides will continue to make speeches, and the Press will make comments! That's the way to govern men."

Sara regarded the administrator, the politician, and the soldier with a deliberate discrimination, when Prestbury cried, "' Give peace in our time, O Lord! ' Labour and the taxpayer are all for pacification. The mailed fist is as out of date as an appendix."

"It is kill or cure," Digby remarked. "If you can't cure 'em my men can kill 'em. But it is a damnable job."

"And more likely to out an officer than any game I know. He does not stand to score whatever happens. John, you must fix this up without ruining old Digby," said Pip gaily.

Mortimer endured their remarks, his mind working grimly on some infuriating spectacle which his imagination presented to him. "I am to proceed rigorously against the smaller fry," he resumed. "There's justice for you!"

"Why don't you resign?" flashed Sara.

"Yes, why don't I?" He answered that very gently. A sadness settled on his fine face like the mists on the hills. "Pounds, shillings and pence. A clinging to power. A dislike of seeing another man manage this crisis in my place. An excuse that my resignation from the Service would not change the course of events. Rotten reasons like that, probably." And he added, "You have often

seen men of all sorts actuated by those motives in Russia too."

"I have," agreed Sara, briefly.

The Commissioner continued: "It is anticipated that Chunder Bōse will come to Faujpore. Daily offerings are made at the sati's shrine there, now. I've a report this morning about two suspected cases of widows' suicide in the City. There is a limit to that, but a religious feeling is on the move. The Thadiana widow's son has cut his name and returned home from his regiment. He received a fervent reception, but the old men are not pleased. His C.O. was glad to let him go as he had become an infection point in his company. He had one unbalanced outbreak—put down to shock at the news—in which he insulted a Mahomedan sepoy. He is quite a lad, has no pension, and is settling down to receive offerings at his mother's shrine. That wipes his uncle's eye, but the boy stirs young blood to unrest in the villages."

"Can't you forbid men in the district to make pilgrimage to Thadiana?" suggested Prestbury.

"The answer is that drought has dried all their wells save one in Thadiana. Fire and water . . . fire and water. There are no substitutes. Not even under a reform scheme. So the mischief spreads." Drifting clouds obscured everything now and Mortimer's form stood out, substantial, against billowing eddies of mist. Moisture dripped from the eaves and a chill breeze scattered water from the swaying dahlias. John looked up at the grey sky whose tattered fringes seemed to sweep the crests of hills and fill the lonely valleys of the

Himalayas. "Those showers are only local, damn them," he said.

"Racquets at four o'clock?" Digby asked cheerfully.

"Yes. Pip, I suppose you can't play?" John said.

"Nothing I'd like better, old man, but I must be off and down the hill by then."

"Well, I thought I'd tell you how things stand, Prestbury. I am sorry for the old soldier men and all their veiled women. This earth has not given them many plums, you see. They want *peace*. Anything for a quiet life. Everything I can say goes through the Punjab Government, but you'll see for yourself how the land lies with the Government of India. Remember two things; sedition works hardest to stir up trouble in the Punjab because the Punjab can fight and is the home of two-thirds of the Indian Army; that's important. And don't forget that as long as the issue of the great war remained doubtful sedition was in a blue funk lest England should be deprived of India by the enemy. Their fear of going out of the frying-pan into the fire gives you the clue to much that is surprising and puzzling when you compare the truculence of the extremist to-day with his caution during the war." Mortimer appeared to utter these words with reluctance and he then lounged away into the enveloping vapours.

Prestbury rose, stretched his arms above his head as a man roused from inaction and cried, "It is a great game, politics. Come and take a hand in Simla, Mrs. Mortimer."

“ Is it a great game as you play it? ” she protested.

Prestbury responded coolly. “ That is an invigorating challenge from a fair lady. Does Chunder Bōse play it better? ”

“ Can you make the tremendous appeal to elemental human passions that he does? ” she asked.

He replied with gay devilment, “ I try to. I’ll try harder. What’s his fascination? ”

Sara muttered sombrely, “ It seems to me that Chunder Bōse appeals to the peasant because he gives to grief a great drama. I tell you that supplies a satisfaction to a mighty craving. He bestows on death the grand rôle ; he rescues it from pettiness and oblivion. That is a magnificent answer to peasant-nature’s demand for significance. The rustic finds it so hard to obtain survival in history. Chunder Bōse cries—‘ Here’s death, here’s pain, here’s pity and fear, but here, first and last, is perfect consummation of married love, faithful and *immortal!* ’ There’s ecstasy for your multitudes. For the physical torture was experienced by the widow only, and ashes are silent. Can your political formulas kindle so great an enthusiasm? In Russia, too, they know how to inflame the people. Politically they incite the mating of a peasant with a woman aristocrat, for thus by a terrific gesture they equalise all social distinctions. If a child is born that infant is the obliteration of proud exclusions and incarnates new relationships. The splendour of an aristocrat’s person attracts the rustic’s deep running tides of life which nourish and

sustain the policy of schemers. Only, by and by, lovers have to withstand other invading males and so the fierce game goes on, human and stupendous." Her voice died away in a deep sigh. She had spoken perilously enough in Digby's stiff opinion.

"I'll endeavour to think out something just as attractive. You inspire me," cried Prestbury. "But, seriously, Mrs. Mortimer, do permit me to give the Viceroy and his wife a chance of hearing all that you, and you alone, can tell them?"

To which Digby's delighted ears heard her reply promptly: "No. The world would say I had gone there to plead John's cause. He'd hate that. The Government of India is flouting him. I will not court them while I eat his salt."

"Salt—what's all this about salt!" remonstrated merry Pip, as though she had said 'poison.' "Salt's a thing to put on a bird's tail to cage her again. Salt's a thing you take with scandal!"

"Salt is a necessity so I'll be careful of it," cried defiant Sara. And then her wilful eyes signalled a language as unconventional as the declaration of her next remark—"You are not the only honoured guest here." With that she turned and entered the bungalow.

Digby, aghast at her indiscretion, stooped an immovable countenance over his hollowed hands as he lit his cigarette. Prestbury swung his lithe form to look after Sara, then turned a comically astonished face back to the silent soldier and after

an eloquent pause in which his alert lips signified all manner of queer things, he remarked in tones of quaintly reproachful confidence, "Look here, Digby, that's what I call a very dangerous woman."

“ I think the gesture strives
Against some obstacle we cannot see.”

“ SARA, you ought to see something of the women here. Why don't you give tea parties? ” Digby had expostulated. The Commissioner growled, “ Why should she? ” but Sara had replied serenely, “ I will.” She did, too, promptly, which seemed to tickle John a good deal.

Sara made a restful picture by the wood fire in her drawing-room, entertaining Mrs. Dearlove to whom her company was a somewhat shocking adventure. Her slight but vigorous frame glowed and dimmed while the firelight played over its beautiful lines. Her tapering fingers repeated darts and weaving movements as she knitted. So mild an occupation reassured her guest who prattled on : “ I hate the rains. All the same the plains will be dreadfully dusty next month when we all go down. The dust in the cantonment is smothering. English housemaids simply would not stand it. Of course relations write to one about servant difficulties at home and envy one out here.

But there are problems for us, too. It is not easy to get the old type of Indian servant now and wages are ruinous. No one at Home understands that *we* have to pay a dozen servants where two could do the work in Surrey. My people live in Surrey. And a drainage system upon which you can depend *absolutely* is ever so much nicer than a low-caste Hindu sweeper. I am sometimes sorry for a sweeper. The other servants are quite friendly as far as talking to him goes but, of course, they would rather die than help a sweeper with his work, or eat any food that he had touched. I believe bad drainage is far more dangerous than no drains at all, so in that way I don't grudge our sweeper his wages. Health is everything. Especially when one remembers the price of a passage to Europe. One never picks up strength in India if one gets ill so the cost of that journey is a nightmare. I think Government ought to *do* something. Letters in the papers seem so useless. Even questions in Parliament gain nothing. I assure you I am almost a Bolshevik at times. Often I wish there was no such place as India. What do we get out of it? Worry and malaria. Even a major can't afford to marry now and that seems so unfair, especially if there are babies."

"What would you do if you were separated from your husband?" suddenly demanded Sara with even breath and calm lips.

"O, I often have been," cried the little woman. "During the war, and for hot weathers, you know. My health can't stand Punjab plains in summer."

"I meant legally separated," persisted Sara. "What would you *do*?"

"It would be very difficult," Mrs. Dearlove admitted mournfully. "I should not remain in India, of course. I suppose there would be something settled on one. I don't know, I'm sure. I can't imagine it. We never quarrel, you see. When we are apart we write to each other every day." Then she yielded to the steady enquiry of Sara's compelling gaze and suggested, "I think I would go as paying guest to some clergyman's wife and take up infant welfare work."

"I could not do that," pronounced Sara, earnestly.

"It would be very quiet," said Mrs. Dearlove. Then she asked tentatively, as though she feared to precipitate a disaster, "What would *you* do?"

"God knows. I expect I should run wild," Sara sighed.

To save this brand from the burning Mrs. Dearlove hastened to reason with her.

"Yes, I know . . . but when youth departs you can't go on running wild. Love of excitement so often ends in trouble for women. Especially nice-looking women. I have moved about the world a lot, for I was brought up in Surrey and did a year in a French family and here I am in India, and it always seems to me that the lucky women are those who make the best of what they've got. Perhaps I am old fashioned. But I admit there is something in Christian Science, Mrs. Mortimer, for a contented mind can

make you happy anywhere. I never would let myself think that my husband might be killed in the war and he wasn't. Fortunately for me I am without ambition. I can't see the good of ambition. Suppose I wanted to go into Parliament with Reginald tied out here? It would just upset one for nothing. And I am lucky in another way, too, for it never matters in the slightest to me whether I am in the swim or not. I never run after anybody. Some people here make themselves perfectly miserable over who has asked them to dinner and who hasn't. Jasmine Jones is a little like that, though I am very fond of her and would always ask her advice if I were in trouble and Reginald were away. But as for invitations, I tell my husband the world can take me, or leave me. Live and let live is my motto."

"Her mind is like a charity jumble sale," thought Sara, who said aloud. "Are you never frightened of Life?"

"No," said the valiant Mrs. Dearlove, stooping to grasp the leg of her chair. "Touch wood. Never. I have been preserved from trouble up to now, so why should I expect Providence to fail me in future?"

"Ah, you feel sure that you are a favourite," Sara remarked darkly.

"A hobby is a great safeguard," Mrs. Dearlove suggested, vaguely uneasy.

"Have you a hobby?" the other asked.

"O, people tell me that I make a perfect hobby of my house and my husband," cried her guest with a happy self-conscious little laugh.

“ And that is enough for you? ” murmured wondering Sara. “ For all the queer enterprises of your mind, the strange initiative of your heart, that suffices? ”

“ I am not restless,” affirmed Mrs. Dearlove. “ And I am what you would call very conservative in most ways.” She was slightly resentful.

“ As regards politics? ” demanded her hostess.

“ O, my dear Mrs. Mortimer, don’t talk to me about politics and politicians! I distrust them all and I am far too busy to bother my head about them. If you want my opinion it is that the present income-tax and death duties are iniquitous; Government should be *made* to act economically. I have to consider every penny! It must be wrong to pauperise labour. No one pauperises me, or Reginald, and I am sure he works like a slave. He is the most conscientious man and often never speaks a word after dinner but just toils and toils. And the Government is so mean in heaps of ways in spite of the outcry about their extravagance. To see money grudged to the Army infuriates me. Where would anyone be without the Army? And all this pandering to extremists is so silly. Murder does not seem to be considered a crime nowadays. What does one pay taxes for except to be protected? Then the men who protect you are grumbled at and the extremists are kow-towed to. Statesmen say one thing and do another. I have no patience! Right is right and wrong is wrong, and life is much too short for me to spend my time worrying how everybody is to be made rich without

working, and trying to find good excuses for criminals.”

Flames leaping upward from glowing logs revealed the watchful expression on Sara's fine face, keen enthusiasms held in leash. Opposite to her the pretty little features of Mrs. Dearlove were composed into a perfectly firm attitude, as though the tangled fibres of her principles and her prejudices were drawn by an obstinate will into a fast knot. Ears that would not hear, but she voiced the trite thoughts of thousands, decided Sara behind her closed and tragic lips. And she was relishing the little woman because she was so human, so wholesome, so cocksure.

Plagued by her own susceptibilities Sara made an effort to discover whether art had magics that could banish the formidable commonplaces which animated Mrs. Dearlove. She spoke of Russian literature, and with awed humility of Russian music, and Mrs. Dearlove gave her polite interest.

“ I am sure some Russians are very clever and well educated,” she observed tolerantly. “ It does not seem to have saved them, poor things. I have very little leisure for music or novels, but I used to sketch as a girl. I have given it up now.” Then Mrs. Dearlove, conscious of an acknowledged splendour in John Mortimer's personality, conscious of a foreign scandal and deplorable foreign miseries that had staged Sara Mortimer in a way which provoked the interest of her world, turned very pink and said very pluckily : “ I just want to

say this, Mrs. Mortimer. Because I like you, my dear. I'm not demonstrative. But my husband likes your husband so much. Do try to forget all about Russia. It is bad for you to dwell on . . . all that. And Mr. Mortimer is so splendid. It is all dreadfully sad; the separation and not knowing where you were, and everything. But you are still young. I want you both to put away sad thoughts. It is really such a romance—your pretending to be Madame Demitriadi, an American (you have *no* accent), and really being Mrs. Mortimer. The war has a lot to answer for. We all ought to be simply thankful to be British, and I am sure you are. Don't, please, think I mean to be horrid or anything, but I can't bear to feel you are so absorbed by Russia. It seems unfair to Mr. Mortimer in a way. That night at dinner . . . you poor dear. But I really do understand. You must not fret about what people think. We know it is difficult in a revolution. There, that's all . . . dear. You don't think me unkind? "

There was an immediate response in Sara's generous face. She answered with simplicity, "There is no unkindness in your heart. I think you are—sweet."

Fluttered and gratified Mrs. Dearlove departed homeward, where her conscientious Reginald neglected a file, which he had brought with him from the office, in order to listen to every single thing that she was able to tell him of her conversation with Sara Mortimer. "I do hope she'll have a child soon," said his wife.

Sara's thoughts sped after her guest with a bitter outcry. "I shall never speak to her of Russia again. She cannot understand. How safe she is! O, how safe."

She realized more and more every day—not continuously, but in the shifting lights of sudden revelations—how far from security was Sara Mortimer. Despite superb health she knew her nerves to have been strained to the uttermost. She could not trust her temper. Time; she desperately required time. Yet hour by hour a history was forming that furnished her with urgent reasons for making certain grave decisions. How much longer, she asked herself, would it be possible to remain under John Mortimer's roof, taking everything and giving nothing? Though nothing had been demanded as yet.

She found no answer in the embers of the fire, but she continued to look into them. She knew that she procrastinated, yet some instinct told her not to force the hand of fate in this matter. While she meditated John came in and sat down opposite her. He had that moment returned from the racquet court.

"Enjoy your tea party, Sara?" he asked.

"It was like landing after shipwreck and having tea and shrimps," she answered. "I have not much in common with your Mrs. Dearlove, but I like her."

"She is not my Mrs. Dearlove, and I have nothing in common with her, but I don't dislike her," he argued whimsically. He was extraordinarily gentle, always, to his wife.

“ Do you care *much* for any woman, John? ” Sara demanded.

“ You ought to know, ” he said, promptly. His whole form suddenly became intensely alive.

“ Ought I? ” she encouraged him.

“ Don’t you remember, in Russia? Long ago, ” his tone was quietly significant.

“ Yes, you *can* care. ” She admitted that memory of long ago.

“ Well then—— ” said John, having pinned her down to it.

A pregnant silence fell between them. They differed greatly in the pace each lived at. The man was easy-going, but swift. In a room his every movement was a quiet drawl, but at a game his quickness was superb. His mind was often idle, but once concentrated its goal was reached in a flash. The woman seemed ruthlessly deliberate; her inexhaustible energy achieved endurance, not haste. Her brain was never slothful, but she arrived at her conclusions by a magnificent unhurried diligence. Like the wind he was in abeyance or astir with unsurpassed velocity; like the tide she knew a ceaseless motion, that was irresistible. She had the greater patience; he the greater passion.

That long disappointing silence ended in John Mortimer hurling himself out of his chair and flinging from the room. The door crashed behind him. It expressed his emphatic opinion of the interview.

Sara watched him go, recoiled at the noise of his departure, and then with a gesture of impudence

kissed her hand to the closed door. "Well, what the devil *do* you want?" she enquired, as though stimulated to vivid interest by his sudden action.

Ever drawn in perplexity towards the open, to wide spaces, Sara left her fireside and that uncompromising door and wandered off, solitary, in the direction of Kashmir Point. Bungalows and servants' quarters set in climbing gardens housed many wayfarers. On the spurs of surrounding hills British regiments camped for summer months. The heights they inhabited were but the lid of the kettle and the steaming heat rose from the Punjab plains to shimmer a few thousand feet below their cooking fires.

To the north a giant snow range flung its great barrier against the noble vault of the sky. The glacier's calm immunity from man's battlefields, man's claims and clamours, attracted Sara like a magnet. The grandeur of the universe had for her tossed soul a stimulating message of power. She left the path and stood where a forest dropped sheer to the twilight shadows of a little valley. A hoary old pine had crashed and lay, its long day done at last, in tragic abasement at the feet of stately and unheeding comrades. From beneath its parching branches darted a tiny stream which hurried singing through ferns and over gleaming stones. Sight could travel straight across the void, league after league. The earth went down and down dizzily from where Sara's feet halted, while at the level of her eyes nothing was tangible save bold outlines of the nearest ranges, and icy crests a hundred miles away. The rest was but a penetrating sensation

of crystal air that moved unpolluted above the roof of the swinging world, and a vibration of ever-changing light. Though black depths and dusky woods defined an absence of all colour, which made its withdrawal even more intensely felt in the violent whiteness of majestic snows, overhead there palpitated an ecstasy of blue, blue, blue; so fair, so pure and vivid that it became an active influence that suggested its exquisite hue to be the predominating loveliness of life, until, like a revelation, came a flush of rose in the west, and all the crests of hills and floating clouds and tops of trees caught fire. Then veil after veil of wondrous fugitive colour touched each flying moment with the awe of a great miracle of beauty declared for some august purpose to the soul of creation.

The exaltation of that moment swiftly conjured up sensational memories which banished calm as insomnia exiles sleep. Where was Lavretsky? Truly, not in the little cemetery in Boulogne, nor in any other, was the tomb of his mortality; the universe was the body's great sepulchre. Could she hold to that thought, avoiding her recollection of a gaping grave and grim coffin? Was her imagination able to retain its wider visions? Hardly; for there came starkly to her mind its stored-up picture of a weeping woman with a muddy skin who had been her fellow-prisoner in Moscow; she was a sickly and frightened little thing. Having developed bronchitis she died, in terror. They buried her in a pit of quicklime, she was just flung in there with many others. Sara frowned; aspirations after the sublime failed to

isolate her from a consciousness of what was actively repulsive. Her face, which was not the countenance of a sage nor an ascetic, told its tale of thirty-one years to the old trees. Youth had shudderingly withdrawn from it. "I am hag-ridden by the things I have seen," she muttered, yet remained quietly among the little startling noises of the forest's solitude: something that clattered down a nullah, something that rustled overhead, something that crept upon the ground. It was not easy to make Sara Mortimer scurry back to the herd.

Shadows wove themselves thick around her. One by one summit and pine hid behind obliterating darkness. Down in a valley a hamlet passed suddenly out of sight. Sara realized that she would be late for dinner and decided to be very late indeed. Then John must wonder what had become of her. As the outcome of her mental conflicts she felt an insistent interest in John emerging. Another hour passed, and heaven and earth wore jewels of light. Nothing variable, elaborate, nor substantial was visible anywhere; only great pits of uniform obscurity and pale stars in their courses, and little fires and lamps. At last she rose, satisfied that she could triumph in a waiting game.

It took her ten minutes to scramble back to the path she had left and her progress homeward was slow for she could not see a yard ahead. Once or twice coolies came through the woods and passed her. She found the encounter formidable enough in the black night. Several times she heard voices of British soldiers returning to camp along the cart road which lay below her. As she groped she

admitted grimly to herself. "Murree suspects me of Bolshevik convictions. As though I had regarded revolution as salvation and stood beside Lavretsky shouting 'Hallelujah!' Must a sailor who has to steer his boat through a typhoon necessarily approve of the typhoon? I did what I could. There was an orgy, and I—I was austere. How many glib critics know what *that* means? I wonder how much Pip Prestbury cared to understand. He entertained me, but 'with the flatterers are busy mockers.' O, how I wish that were not true." At last she reached the Mall and the first bungalow. Soon after she met parties of English people, riding or in dandies, who flocked to a dance guided by lantern-bearers.

Her approach to her home was heralded by shouts. A sweeper, employed by the household in the next bungalow, knew her to be missing and sent a call shrilling through the still air to her compound. Old Kalyan Das was peering by the gate and cried, "Memsahib all right? I not knowing,—much fearing." He salaamed sadly and used the few English words he possessed as one stricken by anxiety.

"Of course, I am all right," said superb Sara, and repeated this assertion to Mortimer, who confronted her on the steps.

"I thought you had fallen down some rotten khud and twisted your ankle or broken your neck," he exclaimed. "In ten minutes several search parties were going out to pick up the pieces."

"What a fuss," Sara remarked, rather gratified,

as she led the way into the dining-room. "I just went off by myself for awhile and stayed in a wood, enjoying the sunset." She sat down, unconventionally, without making a toilet. The spirit of the wilds was still upon her and the atmosphere of her old rough and tumble with existence. She looked radiant and very handsome.

But John Mortimer had touched acute uncertainty during two hours and was in a fighting mood. "I call it infernally inconsiderate," he said deliberately.

"You may, of course, call it what you please," she rejoined with hostility.

"Getting lost is an enterprise which appeals to you," her husband growled, "but it gives a lot of unnecessary trouble."

"When I lose my heart or my head I'll admit myself a fool, but not till then," she retorted. "The dinner hour is not the last trump, or I'd be there on the tick of the clock, no doubt."

John remarked after a tense pause during which observant servants put the wine on the table and withdrew, "One never has this sort of senseless row with a man."

"I am not having a row with anybody," was Sara's bland response.

"Yes, you are." Mortimer's voice could utter that kind of flat contradiction in tones which rendered the remark neither uncouth, nor trivial. "And I don't like it."

"Nowadays, you do not like my ways, nor my opinions," Sara affirmed, and shrugged her shoulders.

“ But I like the look of you. I like the look of you very much.” There was, no doubt, something decidedly attractive in the way he said that, for she was conscious of his power to charm her and replied with a laugh, good-humour restored. “ Yet you might grow sick of the sight of me if I remained for ever in view? ”

“ I am deadly sick of your game of hide and seek.” He stuck to his point.

Sara realized that it was perilously easy to bore Mortimer. Then she discovered that in no circumstances could she tolerate the stagnation of boring him. She leant across the table towards him and asked in tones of unexpected and almost wistful intimacy, “ Mrs. Dearlove boasts that she and her husband never quarrel. Do you believe that, John? ”

“ I should think Dearlove might be fond of her, in a way. She is like one’s good habits, unobtrusive. But it is easy to avoid a row and maintain neutrality if you are fairly indifferent,” he responded.

This explanation proved so satisfactory to Sara that she murmured contentedly, “ I think a quarrel clears the air.”

His blue eyes,—honest, proud, masterful and unswerving eyes,—immediately met hers in a profound contest.

He declared with all the weight of a man accustomed to pronounce verdicts and issue commands, “ Then this air must be as thick as mud for nothing is clear to me.”

Sara was startled. The last thing she desired

was to precipitate a crisis, but though she realised that the adroit course to pursue entailed a soft vague response and a swift departure, there was that within her which responded violently to any direct challenge. She gave rein to a combative impulse and said, "I should have inferred from your reception of me in India that everything seemed clear to you, and that nothing met with your approval."

It was the first time she had made any comment on the position she held under his roof and her voice was almost insolent. John said to himself with fury that women would not play the game. Sara had two courses open to her; she could either put him in possession of all the facts, or accept without challenge the social sanctuary he offered her. If they were to quarrel it should be on the vital point at issue between them, but if she accepted his terms, with all they implied, courtesy was the only possible code.

His manner was distant when he retorted, "*I know* no more than the man in the street, as you are well aware." With rising excitement he told himself that the crisis was come, that the revelation was upon him. Probably he did not realize in the least how unsympathetic he looked, how hostile his stern voice was, nor how formal the whole scene.

Opposite him Sara was in the grip of a reaction; all the passing excitement of her own power and glory had ebbed, all the long strain of danger and emotion had accumulated: for the moment she craved the strength and stimulant of ardent love, of intense admiration. She shrank from criticism to-night. She knew that the inspiration of her

dramatic powers burnt low and without them she never embarked on any argument or enterprise in which she wished to carry her audience with her. Seized by an overpowering sense of desolation, futility, and loneliness a lump in her throat choked her and unwonted tears rose in her eyes. She might have retained her self-control but her effort to do so was half-hearted. Instinctively she let the storm break over her.

What John's searching gaze saw was an audacious face give way under great stress, and hide its secret as it proclaimed its storm. But his need to possess that secret was so acute that he maintained his demand, instinctively awaiting her moment of weakness that should reveal it when exhaustion followed violence.

Fate, which is never impartial and seldom pitiful, decreed delay and discharged Digby into the dining-room, hot with his own enquiries. He had come straight to his brother on catching a flitting rumour that "something has happened to Mrs. Mortimer." Judging by appearances something had. It was an awkward encounter, and John extended no welcome.

Sara recovered first, for her desolate weeping had quenched the fire of her outburst. She gave a rather hysterical laugh and cried, "Come in, Digby! Don't be so shocked. You think I'm in disgrace and that these are tears of repentance!"

"Nothing of the kind," Digby said promptly. He advanced into the room and carried off the thing well. "Nothing of the kind. I feel quite certain

that you are crying over some lapse from virtue on the part of old John—the brute—and that he ought to be ashamed of himself.”

“That’s it,” responded John with an effort. He pushed the wine towards Digby who sat down. Then, most gently, he added, “And I think she is very tired.”

“So tired that I shall go to bed this instant,” Sara announced.

They paid homage to her tears and her departure. Digby took her extended hand and lifting it to his lips kissed it. “Tears are remarkably becoming, Sara,” he said. John’s tone gave her every consideration as he urged: “Sleep well,” when she passed through the door he held open. It closed after her very softly. No slamming this time.

“They are awfully *nice* to women, those Mortimers,” weary Sara commented.

In the dining-room John, his face set and white, gave a laconic description of his unaccountable wife’s tardy return to the bungalow. “It gave me a ridiculous fright. One imagines things . . . that made me irritable. She was overwrought. O, well, I suppose that is married life for you. I am not a skilful hand at it.”

“I was *de trop*,” Digby apologised.

“Not a bit of it. Good luck really. I might have said the wrong thing.” The Commissioner gave a long sigh. Then the two brothers steadily avoided further reference to Sara.

She, before her mind wandered off into deep slumber, admitted to herself that she had run wild that day; erratic of purpose and variable of

emotion. Her lashes were still wet with tears. But what poverty of experience would have been prescribed for Sara Mortimer had life bestowed upon her mere constancy of mood and desire.

“ Once read thy own breast right,
And thou hast done with fears.
Man gets no other light,
Search he a thousand years.

Sink in thyself! There ask what ails thee, at that shrine!”

ON awakening the next morning husband and wife were invaded by strikingly different emotions as the result of the previous evening's events. John's conception of marriage was unity, not the dire contact of collision. Romance vanished for him when the woman who once had been ideally and irradicably his wife mingled an indifference to his passion with secrecy as to her own. Pride isolated him still further from her, save in the existing formal relationship his high and imaginative honour sanctioned as that of host and guest. Sara, simplified in all her outlook by adventurous years during which she had perforce improvised, bluntly decided as the new day stole into her room, “ Last night's row was a mistake. John is like any other man, after all. Goodness knows if there is another woman whom he really cares about, but I see he will make impromptu love to me in certain moods. He holds a trump card as I am married to him. He

has *rights* under this roof, but I do not want to be made love to by him. That is the essential point which I must stick to. If we rush together now—if we have a second honeymoon—it should be forever and ever this time. Anything less would be trivial, hateful, false. And not worth while.” Rising with a quick leap from her bed she looked very intently at herself in the looking-glass. “You are already thirty-one, Sara Mortimer,” she remarked in tones of warning to the face reflected there. “Time is flying, and motherhood is not a thing to miss. But *you* have seen too much to be so cruel a woman as to bring a child into a revolution. I do not know yet how this queer land of India means to behave.” Then she nodded reassuringly to herself. “I’ll be as staunch to you as I can, poor dear. You’ve had enough hell. I’ll get you heaven if it is obtainable which I often doubt.” A laugh broke over her. “Nobody here, I imagine, gives me the credit of seeking heaven. But I go up when I can, and down when I’m thrown. Everyone may fall to one master, but the demands of all others must be resisted à l’outrance. At any rate, I worked faithfully for Lavretsky . . . and I withstood him again and again over dirty work.”

When the Mortimers met at breakfast nothing could have been more pleasant, edifying and conventional than their intercourse, the while—fierce, determined, and wary—both remained a law unto themselves.

That the situation thus created might become stiffly tedious was so forbiddingly clear to Sara that

she welcomed a telegram from Prestbury which announced: 'Returning to Murree. Arriving Grand Hotel this afternoon. Want a good talk with you both.'

"He may as well dine to-night," Sara cheerfully addressed Mortimer. "Or shall we have him to stay with us? He wires from Faujapore."

"O, he has arranged to go to the hotel. Ask him to dine," John replied. He did not want Prestbury to stay in the bungalow again.

"Will you tell Kalyan Das to warn the cook?" said Sara.

A more detached housewife than Sara Mortimer cannot well be conceived. She accepted every appointment in the house, which had no more pretensions to architectural distinction than a hencoup, and all the arrangements of its furniture with absolute unconcern. Only in her own bedroom had her personality declared itself. At all hours of the day and night the great windows there were open to sun and moon, mist and wind. By her bed lay a Bible. On every table were masses of flowers. Much care had been bestowed upon the illumination of her looking-glass. No trace of neglect was to be observed, nor any sluggish sediment of unkempt ways, yet there was always a transient confusion of objects scattered afresh, and soon to be disturbed again, as if a wilful breeze had blown them here and there. The general effect was one of pure air and hardihood, impetuous disorder, and strong convictions. But when she closed her bedroom door she occupied the rest of the house as though it

were an hotel. Face to face with this remote air of hers Mortimer was inwardly hurt, but outwardly uncritical. That there was no breakdown in the domestic service was due to venerable Kalyan Das who manœuvred the household with astuteness. He received some orders from the Commissioner who publically attributed his wife's omissions to her ignorance of the language spoken by their servants. When the arrangements he commanded were, in the opinion of Kalyan Das, unsuitable or inconvenient, the servant murmured that the Memsahib had given directions to the contrary, and Mortimer took the hint and let him have his own way. John was sincerely attached to the old man who possessed the wiliness of a serpent in amazing combination with the humble loyalty of a retriever.

If Sara displayed unconcern with regard to her home she showed an equally marked detachment from society in Murree. Apparently she was without curiosity regarding its affairs; no one heard her ask what appointment Major Dearlove held, or enquire the maiden name of Mrs. Hough. She seemed content to remain ignorant as to the degree of domestic felicity enjoyed by the stout Sessions Judge with his domineering wife Jasmine Jones, and she was not interested in the fact that certain women had what was generally termed a good time in the hills, while others lacked it for no very obvious reason. All the funny, pathetic, irresponsible, petty and childish human elements that stirred and strove in the closely interwoven British community in Murree appeared to escape her notice. She was roused to attention only by

some manifestation of its power, security, prestige and the forces that threatened its existence. So sombre were her memories, so awe-inspiring the knowledge which lay behind her present outlook, that there was but little levity in her attitude towards her environment. Her ardent patience was earnest stuff and her purposes were towards vital goals. Risks always attracted Sara, but intently as they fascinate a born gambler, rather than vivaciously as one who kills time playing skittles.

Sara possessed in excess the power of attracting attention ; hence her isolation from intimate intercourse, and her pre-occupation with populations rather than persons, did not grant her obscurity, but tended to place her acquaintances in the position of an audience. They watched her, discussed her, applauded or condemned her, incapable of oblivion. There were not a few men in Murree who became so fascinated by her face, her mystery, and her renown that the most perfunctory act of recognition from Sara would have led them to besiege her, but her own hidden mental life was strenuous enough to obliterate all else.

Through this solitary and sterile remoteness, which after four weeks in India separated Sara from her past, from her husband, and from the community around her, only Prestbury had begun to thrust his way. He, alone, had shown signs of the initiative, direct action, and audacity which was necessary in order to arrive within striking distance of the real woman.

Lavretsky had given her adoration and power and would give her nothing again. Digby gave her

innocent relationship, affection, a good-humoured criticism; he did more to domesticate her adventurous heart than any other being. Mortimer had at long intervals developed and frustrated her; he rescued her from every petty or pressing humiliation, yet he exposed her to every unsatisfied impulse of passion. The very refuge he offered her was threatened by his rights which were still inherent in the position that he gave and she accepted. But Prestbury came towards her with the unheeded merry call of a light heart and a light love, promising all things. Sara extended the welcome to his approach that she would have given just then to any enterprise that might have held luck, to any revolution of the wheel that might have brought good fortune. She wanted something to turn up trumps.

Prestbury arrived punctually for dinner. Sara was punctual too, and waited for him in the formal drawing-room. She wore a rather barbaric dress of royal blue and purple; her white arms and neck were blazingly fair and the strong brown ripples of her hair caught every shimmer and shade of lamplight. She escaped being a fine figure of a woman, a merely handsome creature, by the extreme slenderness of her tall body, by the refinement of thought and suffering that had etherealized her regular features. Prestbury greeted her with zest; then he stood very erect and motionless in front of her and reported tersely: "I am an unprofitable servant. A hopeless failure in Simla. They won't back up John."

At once he perceived that his words pronounced

his own downfall and he added emphatically, "But, by God, I'll make them regret it when I get Home. The Press has the last word in this, I promise you. And the Lords is no mere Dolls' House, after all." At that something in her intent face told him that he had re-adjusted the scales in his favour. Satisfied, he relaxed his grip on her grave attention and flung himself gaily on the sofa.

"I'm immensely glad to be here again," he cried. "I have been looking forward to this, you know, ever since I left."

She ignored that and said, "I want John to win through."

"Then he shall win through," Prestbury declared. He assumed a position of more far-reaching influence than that held by the Commissioner of Faujpore. He laughed up at her, saying, "I love a fight, don't you?"

Sara made a funny little face and answered, "No,—I don't recognise myself, but I sometimes think I'm all for peace and a quiet life nowadays."

"To the plain all things are pure, but for the beautiful there is no peace in this wicked world. You aren't made for a peaceful backwater. This old Murree, and Faujpore, too—Simla also for that matter—between you and me, they *are* backwaters."

That suggestion seemed to cut the ground from beneath her feet, rendering her restlessly dissatisfied. "Their big problems are interesting," she asserted.

"But their women are not," he said with

twinkling eyes. "Candidly, you are the only interesting woman I have met east of Suez. No wonder you took London by storm. I always call you *The Stormy Petrel*, to myself."

"The world has greater need of the Dove with an olive branch, these days," Sara responded sombrely.

"Olive branches," he cried. "I don't think Mrs. Grundy will ever have the pleasure of seeing you with a dozen little Mortimers. No, you are not a domestic dove." He rattled on so quickly that she had not time to snub him. "I've no use myself for the domestic type of woman. Nor the official type of man,—with all due respect to your John."

"John knows," Sara said drily, "how to exact due respect; don't you worry."

"I'm not mad keen on respect," Prestbury retorted airily. "I'd much rather exact a wild frenzy of love."

He joined her on the hearthrug, debonair and insistent. "Wouldn't you?" he said low into her ear. "Wouldn't you?"

"I exact both," Sara replied firmly.

He fell back a step and cried delightedly, "You are matchless!"

John Mortimer, coming into the room, received a very definite impression when he saw those two together. His imagination had never been keenly interested by clandestine unfaithfulness as a theme in drama or fiction; it did not rouse him particularly and it generally jarred his sense of cheerful

good taste. He simply did not pursue the subject, but here was the subject pursuing him. With his quickness of mind that at times leapt to insight, jumped to conclusions, and anticipated the worst, his thoughts instantly presented a picture of a future relationship between Sara and Prestbury that would demand decisive action from him. He saw himself as standing now between two rivals, a dead Lavretsky and a lively Prestbury.

"This is no mere up-to-date class war," he said gloomily to himself. "They represent very different birth,—those two fellows; but I'm up against the pair of them." He reflected that the Russian had 'cramped his style' to such a degree that the Englishman, did he know all, might justly enough accuse him, Mortimer, of being a mere dog in the manger.

During dinner John turned the thing over in his mind. If his wife had not been an unhappy victim of Russian conditions, but a convert to them, she would very likely go her wilful way with Prestbury. Nothing would stop her. An outlaw has no recognition of such codes as are enforced through religion and custom by a conventional society. The words 'lawful wife' would be merely funny to Sara, animated by rebel emotions and rebel dogmas. The proof of what Lavretsky had made her would lie in what Prestbury could make her. And between them the three might make a pretty fool of John Mortimer. But not an accomplice, nor a dupe. He had opened his door to Sara in spite of Lavretsky, but he would show her the door because of Prestbury without hesitation.

While he sat there with his wife and his friend his intentions were quite clear and unfaltering if the worst came to the worst. He anticipated difficulty in arriving at facts, for he was no spy and to a man of his fibre the idea of touching the evidence of Indian witnesses was unthinkable. Moreover he realized that it would not be an easy task to free his own mind from jealous suspicion, and keep his judgment innocent of prejudice. He knew he was constructing doom now out of the mere scandal of Sara's reputation, his distrust of Prestbury's character—and that look of queer dawning excitement on their faces when he surprised them. He was appalled by the continual fog of ignorance infused with dread through which he groped and he was exasperated by fate's prolonged denial of his need to *know*. From 1914 to 1917 he had not known where Sara was in Russia; from 1917 to 1921 he had not known if she existed; during the last three months he had not known what she was, and now he had to ask himself what she would do next. He wished to heaven she was not so unforgettable, so tantalising, so elusive. To the solving of the riddle that she presented his own education and the recorded experiences of other men gave but dim light. It came to this, that he played a fierce game of blind man's buff, energised by ideals and bewildered by a hundred subtleties of temperament and tradition.

Because Mortimer's antagonistic thoughts withdrew him from sympathetic contact with Sara and Prestbury his personality imposed itself upon them with more than its usual force, and they showed

themselves constrained. It was not that he bullied or argued. He simply demonstrated a very oppressive mood of disregard for their opinions and emotions, and his terse contributions to any conversation were, like the snap in elastic, in complete control of their greater inertia.

But before returning to his hotel Prestbury rallied his forces. There was a keenly ambitious side to him which rated John as more important than Sara. She represented pleasure to him and he fully intended to belittle the power of officials to her as part of his policy of pursuit. But Mortimer represented an adherent in that great game of politics in which Prestbury desired to count. Pip would have suffered intense mortification had it been his lot to be a poor man, the son of unimportant people, educated at a little-known school and launched into life without prestige. Such a position, while not handicapping him too heavily for a career in democratic days, would have rendered him insignificant in the eyes of a small, but self-assertive, section of society. He had been spared that chagrin, and since his lot was cast among those as well endowed socially, though less wealthy than himself, he had discerned early in life, and accurately, where in the eyes of the people triviality lay with its humiliating possibilities. He avoided it by excelling in all manly games and sport: no one could claim to rough it better than he. Endowed with splendid health, and nerve, and freedom from financial worry, he took his high spirits with him into the trenches and distinguished himself as a regimental officer during the war.

Prestbury had the acumen to discern that such rough service would establish his reputation far more securely than a more flagrant success in place and power on the staff. He now could look any hardworking man in the face and yield nothing to him in endurance or efficiency, and he could meet the silent, patriotic, unadvertised fighter on his own ground. He had nothing to fear from any sportsman. And he very effectively refused to admit a high price for all that courage and endeavour. His adroit way was to laugh at the pretensions of the horny-handed toiler, the unrewarded fighter, the strenuous hunter, to represent simple, straight, indomitable manhood. He derided their claim to exclusive experience of what 'real life' is like. "There is nothing in it," he used to laugh. "We are all as the beasts that perish, I admit. But one beast perishes disgustingly like another beast: causing or watching death is not a comprehensive education. As to your laborious fellow by the village pump or in an office, he keeps his old nose to the grindstone in order to give his old teeth something to grind. I can't see anything specially sublime in that. And he is generally a dull dog. To establish touch with vital facts is never easy, so everyone ought to go through the mill for a bit, but it is absurd to say that a man thinks better or bigger because there is sweat on his brow." Thus he gave the illusion to others that Pip Prestbury had passed that way himself and gone long beyond it. He really craved a distinguished political career. His conceit longed to dominate opinion in many countries. Success he truly worshipped. He could

do and dare ; he could *pay*. But there was no great intellect in the man. There was nothing of the student—he termed all such ‘ mere pedants ’—in his character ; in fact there was more of the madcap than the wiseacre in his personality. In spite of his energy and pluck a stolid British public was inclined to consider that he cut capers. He certainly loved manœuvre, loud contest, compromise and opportunism. His very appearance was against him as a statesman ; it was active, engaging, slight,—altogether admirable for a love affair but not monumental enough to carry weight. He gave the impression of having nothing up his sleeve but a card.

With his cigarette lightly held by his curling lips he discussed the situation in India with Mortimer. That evening it went very much against the grain with John to accept Prestbury as a political ally, but he saw the matter in the light of a public service in which his private affairs had no place. Sara, watching the two men, drew her own conclusions as to which of them was disinterested. When Pip left she asked John, “ Will Lord Prestbury go far as a politician ? ”

Mortimer answered curtly. “ Why should he ? To-day big questions need answers. Pip is merely quick at repartee.”

“ He certainly makes haste,” Sara said, rather appreciatively.

“ He may make a fool of himself before long,” Mortimer growled in warning.

“ You told me that he was not a fool,” Sara reminded him.

"I meant that he was not stupid," he explained.

"No," Sara denied aggressively, "no, you have changed your mind. In one mood you admire him, in another you condemn him. You are a changeable man." She was strangely conscious now of having been slightly incensed all along by the change in John from bridegroom to host. To-night he was subtly different from last night. That piqued her, too.

"In what way have I changed?" John demanded. The word struck its note of reiteration between them like a duel of artillery.

The question fired her pride. A great wrath came into her face and she replied hotly: "You can ask me that? Remember I've asked you no questions at all. I can add up seven years in my heart all right and not merely on my fingers. *But*, if you want me to put into words the change that I see in you I can, quite easily. It is this: when we married the whole thing was real,—now you are simply playing at marriage. It's a farce."

There was a tingling gaiety in her anger as she twitted him; there was something buoyant and supremely independent about her that challenged Mortimer to the uttermost.

"No, I am not just play-acting," he said with far more cold self-control than she could display. "I still acknowledge our marriage perfectly definitely, Sara. You boast that you've asked me no question. You may ask me any you like."

They were facing each other with considerable excitement. Neither had anticipated this crisis which once more had swept suddenly upon them.

Sara's curiosity no less than her personal pride was aroused, and his had never slept.

"You mean that?" she threatened.

"Certainly," he retorted.

"Very well then,—who is the other woman?" She told herself that she did not care two straws, that she would be up and off to-morrow if affronted.

"There is no other woman," Mortimer replied steadily.

"I should not blame you," she admitted quickly. To herself she was forced to acknowledge that this was great news. Then she saw the precipitation of the next step. All her arrogance shrank from the possibility that his transformation from lover to friend was due to indifference. She looked at him, lips parted, obviously checked in thought and speech.

Mortimer, too, paused. He hesitated to wrench her humiliating story from her. He remembered her recent burst of tears, but he could not endure to be baffled again. It would be better to get the wretched thing over. Since this opportunity had rushed upon them he would use it thoroughly to-night. Looking away from her deliberately he said in gentle tones: "You say I have changed. You call the present situation a pretence of marriage, and so it is. Well, I put it to you like this, Sara,—and I'd no more harshly blame you than you so generously declare you would have blamed me—the crux of the whole thing is Lavretsky. I think as regards him you should tell me what I, as your husband, need to know."

Sara visualised the situation as clearly as though

it had been written and she was reading the words, —He wants you to confess that you have lived with Lavretsky, and why, but if you deny having done so he may believe you. In spite of your outburst do you truly want him to change the position in this house yet? No. You are not ready. You know that for certain.

It was easier to address that quiet splendid figure while the face was turned away. She said in a low voice, "I still love Lavretsky." Then she went towards the door. At the last moment Mortimer made an automatic movement as though to go and open it for her but she reached it swiftly and passed out.

When Sara entered her own room she flung herself upon the bed, fully dressed, aware of a sudden exhaustion. Her heart was beating with suffocating thumps. "I told him the truth," she murmured. Great excitement gathered in the marvellous darkness of her eyes. "I wonder if I was a fool? He may turn nasty now."

Not altogether a defiant woman at that moment she twisted on to her side with a flash of purple and sapphire and stretched out her arm for the Bible by her bed. Crouching over it with bent head she opened the pages at random. So might women of long forgotten empires have consulted the oracle. Her fateful glance fell on the words, 'His angels He chargeth with folly; how much more them that dwell in houses of clay.' She was strangely reassured and thought, "That's it. There is no use worrying, for in this life none of us can be infallible. If I've made a mistake to-night; it won't be the

first time nor the last." She lifted her arm up and looked at it and its expressive hand, thinking how wonderful is clay. That night she fell asleep smiling.

“Then I and you and all of us fell down
Whilst bloody treason flourished over us.”

THE credit of really challenging Sara Mortimer belongs to Jasmine Jones. The Mortimers had not entertained the Joneses and that little neglect stimulated Jasmine to think long and deeply. She corresponded with a busybody in the south of India who conveyed to her, haphazard, the unadvertised fact that there existed two small camps for Russian refugees close to the cantonment where she lived. In the women's camp sojourned a Madame Koltcheskoff, vaguely described as “such a nice thing, who speaks English well and has a baby and suffers dreadfully from asthma.” That was clearly a godsend. Mrs. Jones began to pull strings and she pulled them as a dentist pulls teeth, painfully and expertly. In order to induce her to cease from troubling, her victims—highly placed officials, but human—arranged that, in spite of regulations and stipulations, the Russian with her infant should proceed at once to Murree and abide there as the guest of Mrs. Jones to obtain relief from her

erratic complaint. Not a word did Jasmine breathe. Even docile Mrs. Dearlove was excluded from her confidence; but not from her meditations, for Mrs. Dearlove had shown a miserable weakness with regard to Sara Mortimer.

With expensive large spectacles set upon her nose, which was always cool and innocent of powder—a prancing, arrogant nose—she wrote invitations to a picnic. It would be more accurate to state that she issued summons to certain persons to meet her and her tea basket at four o'clock on Sunday afternoon in a lovely glade close to the road that curved towards the heights of Chungla Gali.

A few people passed a tired, dark woman with an ayah and a baby, looming through the mist up the old tonga road in a hired motor, but no one knew who she was. She spent three hidden days with her capable hostess, who urged her to rest, and instituted an iron routine of breakfast in her room, an egg flip at eleven o'clock, tea in the garden, burgundy for dinner, and an early bedtime. Several momentous conversations were held. Then Sunday dawned. Rain did not venture to fall. Bright sky, sparkling leaves, hard roads and gay streams were the order of the day and Mrs. Jones regarded creation and decided it was good. The Judge never sat in judgment on his wife; he had not the nerve. It seemed that he was not expected to be present at this very specially planned picnic, and he betook himself to the Club for bridge.

Digby saw to it that John and Sara accepted the invitation. To refuse would cause quite unneces-

sary friction he said, scornfully. He pointed out that John made ridiculously heavy weather over social obligations, and to be bored would not kill him. His chaff and criticism amused John. Sara, who showed herself strangely pliant to Digby, accepted with her secret and sudden smile. Mrs. Hough was all alacrity; that good soul dearly loved a party. The Dearloves could not possibly refuse according to Mrs. Dearlove's lights. Prestbury was swiftly annexed by Mrs. Jones at the last moment.

And after that smiling sleep of hers Sara welcomed the glorious sunshine of Sunday's dawn. John was absent from breakfast and lunch, merely announcing that he was working off arrears in his office. Kalyan Das assured an unconcerned wife that her lord was provided with sandwiches. Sara's temperament could fling her with abandon into the joyous strength of the tingling air, the dance of light upon the hills, and thus secure release from the immediate thought of Mortimer, brooding over the announcement of the previous evening.

At first John had experienced a brief sense of relief. He thought he knew the worst at last. But, as the night hours passed, he discovered that his mind still struggled through uncertainties, obscurities. He had perforce to relinquish his own vague hopes and clear cut theories. It was now obvious that Sara had not been a victim. Thus guilt was established. She was just an unfaithful wife, who had returned to her husband's roof because it suited her book. There existed excuses :

distance, absence, isolation, social chaos and danger were powerful forces that might well disintegrate the union of John and Sara Mortimer. And that Russian swine was dead. Life remained triumphantly in Mortimer's hands, and Sara was for him the only adequate fulfilment of life. He still wanted her. He wanted to obliterate, to wipe out, the whole infernal Russian exile, including his own desecrated honeymoon. Let the past die with the dead. He had Sara now in his sight, within touch, under his roof. He felt her to be subtle, piercingly strong and strange and tragic. Could he forego bliss, or should he grasp and possess her in spite of his shattering knowledge and her memories? His passion surged.

Then came re-action. The tide that fate had caused to ebb again and again in long years went out once more. He grew conscious of that baffling quality in Sara which always conveyed to his instincts a vague something that was difficult to reconcile with a sordid history. In all emotional moments she had struck him as fiercely pure. And, on the mental side, how could she have fully accepted Lavretsky's standard?

His humiliation sharpened as he went over last night's scene for the hundredth time. She had told him that here and now, in the actual present, in his house, antagonistic to his existence as her husband, independent of his personality as a man, she loved Lavretsky.

Loved him. It was a tremendous assertion and puzzle. How love a damned Bolshevik? A victim had been imaginable. A passing craze was think-

able. But love was on a different plane altogether. Love might be unconquerable, immortal.

In the end his self-restraint imposed its habitual sway. Sara's declaration, "I still love Lavretsky," raised a barrier but did not lift a curtain. The forbidding words had some dignity, however, and they summoned his own. He fell back on his old attitude towards her, of protection without reconciliation. He said to himself that for seven years he had thought so much and so violently about her that he would go to pieces if he did not now turn to mental distraction in his work. He avoided meeting her till it was time to start for the picnic. Then he found her in high spirits.

She was in her white dandy, set upon the garden path; with the dahlias swaying above her. She looked up from among her scarlet cushions, past the white-clad dandy-wallahs, who wore scarlet belts and putties and scarlet bands like cockscombs in their turbans, to where Digby Mortimer and Lord Prestbury were approaching on their ponies. She cried to them, "I have never been in this thing before and I know these men will drop me!"

"Courage," said Digby. "Mrs. Jones would have dropped you if you had refused her invitation. What do you weigh?"

"Not much. I'm a very light woman, really," said Sara.

"Are you? I wonder!" flashed Prestbury, then cried, "Here's John."

The coolies heaved the dandy to their shoulders and marched with broken paces. The three

Englishmen rode ahead and as their path curved and climbed they seemed at times to ride on the edge of the world. Sara's face grew sombre and halfway to the rendezvous she shouted, "John! tell these men to stop and put me down."

"Are you uncomfortable? There are still two miles to go," John called back. All three men turned in their saddles.

"I don't care. I can't stand using those poor creatures as beasts of burden."

Mortimer gave the order. The men halted and set the dandy on the pine needles. Their brown skins glistened with sweat and their breath came in thick, quick sighs. "They are all right," the Commissioner assured her.

Sara was on her feet, indignant. "I keep on hating the idea of it."

A coolie, dressed in rags and bent double beneath a pile of wood, shuffled past them all, never lifting his bent head. A cap was set on his skull like the cup of an acorn. Digby flipped the logs lightly as he passed and remonstrated with Sara, saying, "You aren't as heavy as this, my dear girl,"

"But I'm human!" she cried.

"Tired?" John asked the dandy-wallahs.

"Nay, Sahib," they said, "we do but take breath. We are strong men, and poor, and your servants."

"They declare you weigh a ton, Sara," teased Digby.

Prestbury swung himself off his pony. "A walk with Mrs. Mortimer is my affair exactly," he

announced. So he and she marched together slowly over the hills, while the Mortimer brothers in silence rode on and out of sight.

When Sara reached the picnic party it was to find that tea had begun and all were assembled in a little sloping glade, dappled with sunshine, that hung like a slanting roof above a precipitous drop to a valley far below. Only one stranger was present, and in acknowledging the chorus of greetings that assailed Sara she paid no attention to a rather dark and sallow woman, in a neat pepper and salt habit, who sat on the higher level of the slope, separated from her by the width of the big table-cloth. John also remained oblivious of the Russian; he noted only the look of exhilaration on Prestbury's face and the air of awareness that Sara had, like the awareness of a little scuttling rabbit's nose. She was as striking as the stranger in the shade seemed insignificant, and her gay yellow jumper and skirt reflected the pool of light in which she sat.

Mrs. Jones waited till tea was over and cigarette smoke curled peacefully upward; then she gathered the attention of all her guests by breaking a moment's general silence with a deliberate and emphatic exclamation addressed to Sara. "O, Mrs. Mortimer, I am so sorry! So stupid of me—I believe that I forgot to introduce you to the guest who is staying with me—Mrs. Mortimer, Madame Koltcheskoff."

The latter name fell upon the whole group with a thud. Only now did Jasmine pronounce it distinctly. This time she blew it like a war trumpet.

It instantly roused Sara, who turned on her elbow and bowed to the Russian.

Mrs. Jones proceeded to exhibit her trophy. "Madame Koltcheskoff escaped from the Bolsheviks, through Persia, to India. It was the most terrible adventure. Her husband died on the way. She lost two children from sheer privation in Russia. The youngest baby is with her. Such a dear wee mite."

"When did you reach India, Madame?" Sara asked, very softly.

"Six weeks ago, or seven. I forget the time, it seems so long."

"You speak English marvellously well!" cried Mrs. Dearlove.

"She had an English governess, of course," Mrs. Jones informed them. She swept Mrs. Dearlove from the conversation, and announced, "I've made Madame Koltcheskoff promise to tell us the real truth about Russia. We have never heard it."

Digby looked quickly at Sara; imperturbable, but—yes, the colour had flinched from her firm lips.

"I think some know the truth about us," said the Russian. "But not those who go just to tour, and are shown what the leaders wish them to see. No, that is no good."

"Horrors give me creeps," murmured Mrs. Hough in dire apprehension.

"People won't face facts," Mrs. Jones said severely. "But just listen——"

“The people starve. Everybody starves, except commissars, troops, and some profiteers in the south. You have to bribe and bribe, and paper that is money to-day is valueless to-morrow.” Madame Koltcheskoff seemed to search for words, and then said, “You British can’t imagine it—no safety, no house, no home, no news of relations and friends. All danger, all suspicion and lies. No doctors and no proper food for the sick and for children. Mine got typhus but I could do nothing. And who has benefited by all the misery? No one.”

“Tell them what happened to your brother?” goaded Mrs. Jones, and cried triumphantly, “It is too frightful!”

“When Rostov was taken by the Bolsheviks——” the thin well-bred voice went on monotonously—“my brother, who had been wounded while fighting with the volunteer army, was left behind in the hospital. The Bolsheviks dragged him from his bed and kicked him to death.” The Russian held herself rigid, as though stiff with blood. “We heard about it when Rostov was re-occupied by our troops for thirty hours. A commissar’s mistress had saved my sister-in-law who bribed her with all her jewels.”

The British officers listened with a quiet sympathy and respect. Mrs. Hough’s eyes filled with easy tears, and Mrs. Dearlove stared and stared. Sara suddenly addressed Madame Koltcheskoff in Russian. As the strange sounds rose and fell attention was riveted on the two women, who appeared to agree, not argue. But it seemed as

though what was animating Sara was receiving from the other a mere languid assent.

Mrs. Jones flung herself between them, crying, "O do speak English! We long to hear."

"I was merely saying how greatly the soldiers had been neglected and the poor oppressed under the old régime," Sara explained, and fell silent.

Compassion which surged from Sara was absent from Mrs. Jones. Turning to Madame Koltcheskoff, she said very distinctly, "Do describe how you had to give up your pearls, when you were in the province of D——."

Digby exclaimed to himself, "Gad! I believe our Jasmine means real mischief."

"O that——" said Madame Koltcheskoff. "That was at the beginning of all the worst trouble. My husband was then with the army at the front, having much difficulty with the soldiers, and I was staying with my parents."

Sara interrupted her to ask, "Was your husband in the P—— regiment? I knew an officer of that name in it."

"No. That was my husband's brother." The Russian stared at Sara and then resumed. "The peasants came and burnt our home which is four miles out of the town. They did not kill my poor old father, but dragged him off to the Soviet. My mother was very delicate, and my little girls were so small, but we all walked to the town and tried to find out what had happened to him. We went to a room in a friend's villa; everyone was crowding up together. The head of that Soviet was a cruel brute—an ex-officer who had deserted

—terribly ambitious, and they said his wife would do anything for bribes. She had been a local schoolmaster's daughter, and her brother had been exiled to Siberia. He is a great man now. Everything was in confusion. I could not discover where my father was, for one person said this and another that. Lies, and fear, and excitement—it was a madness! So I went to find that awful woman to offer her a bribe. I did not wish to give all my pearls, knowing I might need to ransom some other life. I offered her half and she said I was to come back to-morrow. I went next day and she took every pearl I possessed—she was crazy for them—and she told me that she had found out that my father was in prison, but that she would make her husband release him. She said that if I told others how she had helped me I would be quickly murdered, and she pretended to be very kind, and wept. When I arrived back at the villa I found the true news that my father, with many others, was already shot and his body flung in the river. They had done it the night before as she knew quite well, and her husband, very drunk, had sat on a chair and looked on. When my mother heard she died of a heart attack. I stayed in that place a long time, because if I had left the town my husband would not have known where to find me again. Afterwards we escaped south together and my husband joined Kornilov. The wretch who had my father executed gained more and more power.”

“It's appalling,” cried Prestbury explosively.

“You tell it so wonderfully well that I almost

imagine I can see it," Mrs. Dearlove declared, as one greatly privileged.

But Mrs. Jones was in command of the situation and she rapped out a very clear question. "Madame Koltcheskoff, what was the name of that commissar creature?"

"His name is well known now, I think," replied Madame Koltcheskoff. "It is Lavretsky."

As by word of command all looked at Sara.

"That damnable woman planned this scene," Digby swore to himself.

With turbulent eyes Sara said stonily, "Lavretsky was not always drunk."

"You knew him? But how——?" cried Madame Koltcheskoff.

"I was known as Madame Demitriadi—his secretary—for a long time," Sara replied at once.

There fell a tense silence which the Russian held as it were between her teeth. She flicked the ashes from her cigarette, her head bent to watch her lowered hand. "Is it possible?" she murmured icily.

Then Madame Koltcheskoff drew a long breath, as though she accepted, shuddering, the situation thrust upon her by her dreadful exile. But her protest was plain when she pointed away from Sara to a clearing in the forest and said to Major Dearlove, "I would like now to look at that view over there, please?" As she was obediently escorted towards it her repudiation of an erstwhile Madame Demitriadi hung like a sentence over Sara's head.

Jasmine sat in an eloquent calm, toying impressively with her string of pearls. The superiority of the régime which enabled her to flaunt them in security was thus blatantly expressed. Yet her triumph was not all that she had anticipated, for Sara, unflinching, made but one quiet comment, breathed softly into the unquiet atmosphere. "It is human nature to feel as she does."

Prestbury's quickness was a saving grace. He instantly consulted his wrist watch and said, "Mrs. Mortimer, since you insist on walking we ought to start at once." He helped her to her feet and retained her hand for a noticeable second while she stood beside him.

Sara turned upon her hostess. She looked dangerous and Mrs. Jones flushed. But she merely remarked with an inscrutable smile, "It has been a memorable occasion."

"A curious coincidence," Mrs. Jones conceded. "The world is a small place."

Prestbury shook hands without uttering a word and followed Sara as she swung upon her heel. John put the finishing touch. He laid his hand on Sara's shoulder and stood intimately beside her under all their eyes while he asked her, "Sure that you prefer to walk?"

She lifted her face to his. He saw that she was an unabashed but deeply stirred woman. "Quite sure, thank you, John," she replied and he released her.

A striking little pageant moved away through the dark pines; first the yellow of Sara's dress flashed between their giant stems; then Prestbury's

brown tweed, and the white and scarlet of her men flickered and faded.

John Mortimer called to his syce and addressed Mrs. Jones in one word—"Good-bye."

Digby moved, but Mrs. Hough grabbed his arm unceremoniously. "Don't you dare to abandon me," she hissed, and he let his brother ride off alone.

Mrs. Dearlove sat meekly by Jasmine, and Mrs. Hough heaved herself off the ground. "Well, Colonel Mortimer is going to show *me* a view now. We can all play at that game," she said in her jolly fat voice, and rolled away followed by Digby.

She only went a few yards, then turned to survey the backs of Mrs. Dearlove and Mrs. Jones. The latter's voice came clearly up the slope. Mrs. Hough sat down behind a tree and said with a chuckle to Digby, "Sit here. I mean to listen to old Jasmine's plots."

"Nonsense," said he. "We can't."

"I can," she declared. "Can and will. Wouldn't miss it for worlds. If you won't I'll repeat it to you later."

"I intend to gaze at your wonderful view," he retorted and, strolling on, flung himself on a bank out of earshot. He looked over his shoulder at Mrs. Hough, beckoned, and laughed. She shook her head and remained where she was with an expression of wrapt attention on her face.

Presently she joined him. "How mean!" she upbraided. "You might just as well have been a cad, too. That woman—what a viper!"

"Listeners never hear good of themselves," jeered Digby.

"Me? O that was nothing. She simply called me a fool; a fool and a dupe," Mrs. Hough told him contentedly. "She was much worse about you. The point is that she has great plans."

"Mrs. Jones' propaganda!" Digby scoffed.

"Yes, against your sister-in-law. She feels she has been officially forced to know Mrs. Mortimer, and——"

"And so she pressed her to join this delightful party," drily interposed he.

"Yes, so like her! She says she found herself compelled, against her better judgment, to accept that lovely lady socially, in spite of rumour."

"Exactly. *Rumour*, for evidence was lacking," snapped Digby.

"O dear me, don't be so like a man! Jasmine relied on the evidence of her own senses, she says. She objects to Mrs. Mortimer's sometimes defending the Russians. She calls that being nothing less than a Bolshie agent and says that such a wife ought to ruin your brother's career in any decent country. I call dear Jasmine's mind hell on earth, don't you?"

"That describes it exactly," Digby said approvingly. "Well, what next?"

"Jasmine intends to blast Mrs. Mortimer. She used those very words: 'This should blast her bubble reputation as a celebrated woman.' She says that every self-respecting Englishwoman in Murree ought to cold shoulder her for having aided and abetted a monster like Lavretsky."

“ Fool ! ” commented Digby.

“ Ah, but others will follow a definite lead like that, and the Russian woman will be the new sensation of the moment,” sighed wise Mrs. Hough. “ That Russian’s gesture ! She seemed to flick Mrs. Mortimer in the face. Your poor brother. . . . What did you think about it all ? ”

“ That both Madame Koltcheskoff and Sara showed considerable spirit. It was a horrible affair.”

“ Well, your brother is my idea of a sahib. I’m glad Lavretsky was murdered all right in the end. That’s one comfort.”

“ You are a kind dear,” Digby’s eyes smiled at her as she rose.

“ ‘ A dupe and a fool.’ Thank you for that, Jasmine my love. Well, come on and listen to *me* now ; my knees are wobbling, but that is partly rage and I mean to get my own back.”

“ We have had enough scenes for one afternoon,” he urged.

“ I adore scenes, when I make them,” she declared, and plunged down on Mrs. Jones while vigorously waving her parasol at her dandy men to bring up her dandy. “ I’m off now, Jasmine,” she announced : and added untruthfully, “ If it were not too late I’d go straight to church and pray for a little *móre* faith, hope, and *charity* at picnics.”

Mrs. Jones replied with calm, “ And a right judgment in all things.”

“ Say good-bye for me to that poor Russian.

Unless she hates parties I'll be delighted if she will dine with us when my husband returns from his tour of inspection."

"It would depend——" Mrs. Jones paused impressively. "Colonel Mortimer won't misunderstand me if I say that I fear Madame Koltchesskoff would not care to meet Mrs. Mortimer again."

"Directly I get home I shall write and implore Mrs. Mortimer to dine with us next week. I'll ask Madame Koltchesskoff another night, but it will be a duller party," Mrs. Hough retorted.

Mrs. Jones with flushed disapproval began, "Of course, Agnes, everyone selects their own guests——"

Mrs. Hough lost her temper, "I'd sup with the devil if he had good looks, pluck, and fame. I am a friend of the Mortimers, and I stick to my friends."

"I stick to what is right," said Mrs. Jones.

"Then you'll be lonely and bored to death. Good-bye, and I fear you lack the knack of how to live and let live, my dear." Mrs. Hough went off panting to her dandy.

"You fail to realize that this is a serious matter," called Mrs. Jones to her retreating form.

To Digby Mrs. Hough remarked doubtfully, "Did I score?"

"Full marks," said he.

Mrs. Hough, swinging along in her dandy, turned and cried, "Look!"

Digby looked and saw a dark figure emerge from the sombre forest. It was the Russian. Exiled,

penniless, widowed, and a bereaved mother, she seemed to gather up all the shadows and wear their weeds. His pity drew him to her, but more powerful than pity was his knowledge that she was an enemy to his house.

"I too have long'd for trenchant force
And will like a dividing spear;
Have praised the keen unscrupulous course,
Which knows no doubt, which feels no fear."

"My dear, don't be absurd," Digby said, very gently. He looked down at his sister-in-law, crouching by the log fire.

"It is not absurd," she cried passionately. "O the conventionality of all you people in India! I tell you I must and will get hold of Madame Koltcheskoff and have a real talk with her—talk it out!"

"To the bitter end?" He indicated his apprehensions as to the result.

"Would the end be bitter?" That question of hers, on which she brooded long, was mysterious to Digby. He could not follow the process of thought and emotion behind her suffering eyes.

He tried at last to cheer her. "It is all very insignificant, Sara. What does it amount to? Little Murree, a pompous, narrow woman, and a refugee who brings a swarm of prejudices and a cloud of rumour with her, poor soul. Can't you

see that in perspective, remembering the tributes you received from the Cabinet? ”

“ What did the Cabinet know of the real Lavretsky? ” she muttered.

“ Of his private life? ” Digby hesitated. He was unwilling to hear any definite revelation of her relationship with the Commissar.

“ No, I know his private life,” she drew a long ghastly sigh.

He watched her affectionately. There was something wonderfully lovable in her warm beauty, her warm voice, he thought. Digby understood full well why John did not shake free of her. She had an unforgettable quality.

“ Better let the thing blow over,” he quietly urged.

Sara made a rebellious movement that passed in one swift gesture from her hands to her defiant head. “ Which was the genuine Lavretsky, and which my influence manifesting itself through Lavretsky? ” she said, very low. “ *That* matters to me. Shall I let the truth drift away from me? ”

“ It still matters to you? ” Digby spoke in remonstrance, but indulgently.

“ Now—and perhaps always,” she answered with a sombre strength in her tones. “ What Madame Koltcheskoff said of his wife was all true. It was her exactly. I must know what she knows of Lavretsky—I must! ”

Sara rose, and going to her writing-table, which was primly tidy from disuse, appeared to attack violently a piece of notepaper with a pen, as one

engaged on murder. Digby smoked serenely by the fire. She was maddening, but it was impossible to quarrel harshly with a woman according to the Mortimer code.

Presently he addressed her ominous back that bent to her task. "Sara, she will show that invitation of yours to Mrs. Jones to a moral certainty. And Mrs. Jones will thoroughly enjoy dictating a refusal. You are laying yourself open to a snub."

"Yes, wide open. I believe you'd rather expose yourself to a bomb. It would take a thousand snubs to turn me from this—or any—purpose on which I am resolved," Sara retorted, without ceasing to write.

"A wilful woman," he said, philosophically. But when she turned at last with the addressed envelope in her hand he added, "I call it rather rough luck on John. You don't imagine he enjoys his wife receiving a rebuff?"

Sara frowned upon that. "John, and his salt," she said. "You know that counts with me?"

"Yes," Digby replied. "I have heard you make a point of it."

"Well—I can't weigh it grain by grain and give him equal measure in detail. I am doing my best, Digby." Then a reckless impatience seemed to animate her. "May I not be myself? It is natural to me to push social formalities on one side and strike through to the truth about Lavretsky. You hamper me when you urge consideration for John. Has he not enough to do with four million

truculent Punjabis to govern? Need he be measured against the spite of Mrs. Jones? Keep your John out of it—above it.”

“You don’t,” Digby remarked bluntly, but kindly. “You don’t, Sara my dear. That is just it. You contrast Lavretsky with John and invite public attention to the rivalry.”

She hesitated; and deliberately asked at length, “Is that what I do?”

“I think so. It looks like it to me,” he gently replied.

Sara made a movement as though to free herself. “I am sorry about the audience,” she said. “I am too much in the public eye for the Mortimer family. But I won’t shrink at this crisis, Digby. Let me measure Lavretsky now if I can—my God! if I can. Suppose his measure falls short of John’s?”

She went quickly to the window and summoned a gorgeous chaprassee. When she failed to make him understand her directions Digby intervened and despatched the man to the Judge’s bungalow with the note. Sara asked him to await the reply and they sat companionably by the fire; each reading, or pretending to read.

Directly Madame Koltcheskoff’s answer reached her Sara tore open the envelope without any affectation of indifference. Then she gave a short, hard laugh and read aloud, ‘Madame Koltcheskoff presents her compliments to Mrs. Mortimer and begs to decline her invitation.’

“If that is due to Mrs. Jones her insolence is unbounded,” snarled Digby. “Well, well.”

Sara stood with her head thrown back; an incarnate energy. "Wait; I shall get into touch with Madame Koltcheskoff in the end. She has suffered; she is an enemy for the moment. But Russians are vague, and changeable. She is probably superficial. This is the first round of the battle to her and Mrs. Jones. But you wait—you wait."

"Not downhearted? That's right," said Digby, and bent to knock the ashes out of his pipe. "But the unfortunate woman has lost almost everything, and she is our guest in India. Doesn't it strike you that to force yourself on her is to persecute her?"

Sara met his eyes frankly. "Yes, it does. Horrid, I admit. But I can't afford to be chivalrous like you."

She went again to her writing-table and asked him if he would take a note from her to Lord Prestbury when he returned to the hotel.

"Of course," said Digby, and when she had written it and placed it in his hands he asked with disapproval, "More plots and plans?"

She smiled up at him, thinking how good-looking and kind he was. "Yes. To the bitter end, as you said——" Then the strange woman flung her arms round his neck, drew down his head caressingly, and kissed him. "You are good to me, Digby," she murmured.

"I happen to have an affection for you," he replied, immensely touched.

"I know that," she answered, all aglow. "The reliable kind;—affection, British, warm."

“That’s it. And always at your service,” he told her lightly.

Sara smiled wistfully. “And at the service of your friend’s wife, your kith and kin, your brother-officers, your sepoy, your dog, your horse. It is a lovely thing. It is energetic; it plays the game. O how I’ve watched it here, now that I am with the British again! I contrast it with all the cruelty I have seen.” She knelt down on the old Persian rug, and beat the logs with the poker till sparks crackled and dashed. With the same violence, she cried, “I hate cruelty, Digby.”

“It is the one really hateful thing,” agreed the soldier, his elbow on the mantelboard.

Her eyes held a deeply puzzled dismay as she continued, “But a cruel man can be magnetic. It is the display of power, perhaps; without remorse or misgiving to dilute it. It has a way of inspiring me with interest and awe. It half fascinates me. Can you understand that?”

“No,” said Digby, without compromise.

She sat there, on the rug, with the light from the flames pouring over her, and her vibrating voice pleaded. “Picture cruelty on a terrifically *big* scale. The cruelty of life and death, all unending. Ice and snow, and the black thickness of forests stretching towards the North Pole, and the naked frozen dead thrust out from typhus trains to line the route. I’ve seen that. The wildest beauty, Digby, and the ghastliest desecration; side by side, mile after mile, in the dawn, at noon, drifting into the night, with the train shuffling on and on. It was in such a scene that Lavretsky and I met, and

I nursed him. It haunts me : a horror and a loveliness ; and his vital need of me then, lest he, too, should be thrust out. . . . And dying horses ; starved, staggering about a city's cobbled streets. The vivid pictures and the pathos. Their attitudes—with those hanging heads, and the dilated nostrils, the frozen breath, and the quivering efforts to rise—have an eloquence. Eloquence is a great agitator. . . . And a young wounded Cossack, lying down to die in silence : the tiredness and the despair and the ebbing strength. A life consumed by war and hardship. Doesn't such a manhood in its colossal doom attract the mind? "

"It is morbid to dwell on it," said Digby. "Well? "

"Morbid if you like," she conceded slowly, "but the impression made is powerful. You become terribly aware of doom and destiny and tragedy—big things like that. And so when you come in contact with a great ruthless man, who has magnetism of gesture, expression, oratory, your imagination bestows on him the grand rôle. You *do* become fascinated, Digby."

"No," he reiterated. "One has a contempt for a brute."

"I wish I had," she sighed. "I have not."

"You are primitive, then," he remonstrated lightly. "I shall give old John a hint to treat you like a squaw."

She looked up and laughed at that. "Let him try!" she responded in a queer tone. "I have

generally managed to impose my own terms, you know. John would be absurd with a cudgel, not having instinctively grasped it. I'd die of laughter. Do you think I can't distinguish between a bludgeon and a man? John's strength lies in his code and the way he sticks to it. He has no guile, no cant. Methods of barbarism would be an affectation in him. He is a Christian; a romantic out and out."

"He is a good sort," Digby said. He was puzzled by her mood. "You find him romantic, do you?"

"O yes. It makes all the world his friend. There is no need for me to champion John!" she spoke forlornly.

"What about Simla? No champion for John there," Digby reminded her, and when she withheld any comment he took his departure.

He had not seen his brother alone since the picnic and did not know what John thought of that painful encounter between the two women. All Murree was agog with gossip and surmise. Every one declared that things looked black for Sara Mortimer when news spread of the Russian's refusal to meet her. Madame Koltcheskoff went to a big dinner-party that night and made quite a sensation. All the men were attracted by her and the Judge hardly left her side. Prestbury, who answered Sara's note in person next morning, gave her a vivacious account of the evening's events. He implied that he might have enjoyed many favours but was too indifferent to accept them. "Her skin is like leather," he declared. "I think

your Bolsheviks were quite right to let her slip away. But she is a very forthcoming lady indeed."

"I wrote to you because I want you to arrange a meeting between us," Sara told him, calmly. "Persuade her to go for a ride with you and I will meet you somewhere."

"Her presence would spoil that!" said Prestbury, alert.

"It is her presence that I desire. I want a real talk with her and no interruption," Sara continued.

"A pleasant little chat like you had two days ago?" Pip murmured blankly. Then he gave a long whistle, "You are the most delicious surprise in this dull world. I'll deliver her into your hands without fail. Pistols for two and the survivor for Pip. Live for my sake, won't you?"

"Are you sure she will go with you?" Sara asked doubtfully.

"To the devil," he gaily declared. "May I come to dinner to-night? I will bring her answer."

Though resolved to make use of him Sara was irritable with Prestbury that evening. They squabbled intimately while Mortimer looked on in a glum silence. Women's manners were undisciplined and their quarrels ugly, he thought. It was impossible for him to shake Jasmine Jones like a rat, yet the picture of her respectable and arrogant person, as she laid down laws of conduct for that ardent rebel at the end of his table, exasperated him beyond measure. He meditated manslaughter as regards the Judge: why on earth

did he not snub his wife to death instead of letting her prate and meddle? And here was that self-confident fellow Prestbury at his table again and on insufferably easy terms with Sara; it seemed to cheapen her. He knew that if he allowed his own violent feelings expression there would be a merely futile row all round, premature and weak.

Prestbury was uncomfortably impressed by Mortimer's aloofness. He envied the man his innate distinction, envied him his strength in dealing with Sara. Pip was incapable of independence where such a woman was concerned; he simply could not leave her alone. With adroitness he brought the conversation round to the subject of men of action in war. In doing so he tilted hard at Mortimer's tamer record as mere administrator. John set his teeth. He would not admit that this brilliant guest could rag him at his own table. His handsome face showed itself unmoved, and he would not be drawn into any belittling comment on soldiers.

It was Sara who suddenly checked Prestbury. "A fragment of shell killed the other man and struck you? Well, a girl I knew in Russia had three bayonet wounds."

"Rather a rough and tumble for a lady," remarked Prestbury. "I should feel somewhat uncouth fighting a woman with a bayonet, wouldn't you, John? Deliberately poking it in, you know."

"John would rather poke fun at her," said Sara, drily.

Mortimer merely rejoined, "Much rather.

Women are dangerous people to take seriously."

"Sentiment about your sex is absurd," Prestbury assured Sara. "I'd treat any woman as an equal and murder her like a shot if she asked for it. Now John is really full of Victorian myths and expects you ladies to be as good as gold and as obedient as lambs. When I marry I shall give my wife all the liberty she can use and claim the same for myself, but if she wants me to go in for old fashioned chivalry when she has a latchkey, a vote, and a seat in Parliament I shall say, 'My dear girl, don't be an ass; romance is dead. I married you for your money and you of course married me for my looks.' Do you think I shall be happy?"

"You'll grab lots of fun, anyway," said Sara grudgingly.

"I'd have a try for it. But one stands a better chance unmarried; don't you agree, John? Own up like a man. Give us two birds in a bush every time: what's the fun of a bird in the hand to a sportsman?"

"That reminds me of a woman, who——" began Sara, but Prestbury transfixed her with a stupified glare.

"John, look here,——" he remonstrated, "can't you convince your wife that I am a man? I appear to remind her of every old woman in Europe. Of what do you remind her, I'd like to know?"

"John——?" drawled Sara. She let them both wait for her words; Mortimer imperturbable and Prestbury on the *qui vive*. "O John reminds me of a lion-tamer."

Prestbury could not endure to accept that comparison. He felt no match for the silent Commissioner, who forcibly conveyed the idea that Prestbury was making a fool of himself. So he rose, wineglass in hand, and with a gay cry of, "Don't you think an old woman like me ought to sit with you, Mrs. Mortimer?" he followed Sara as she left the dining-room. Soon the sounds of his voice and Sara's laughter tingled in Mortimer's unwilling ears. He stared at their empty places, at the confusion of their coffee cups and cigarette ends, and told himself that it was infernal impertinence on Prestbury's part to gallivant off like that. His own experience coloured his picture of Sara's welcome; for had he thus pointedly pursued women he knew what his success would have been. His thoughts did not dwell on that, because he always felt an impatient contempt for a coxcomb, but he had a certainty. He sat there for a long time in a suffocatingly quiet rage, conscious of the servants' bewilderment when they came in to clear the table and found him still there, alone. Then he realised that silence reigned in the bungalow, and he got up and walked into the drawing-room with an air of invading enemy territory. His mood received a startling check when he encountered none but a solitary woman, stretched full length on the sofa with her eyes shut.

He stood beside Sara, looking down on her, and demanded, "Why a lion-tamer?"

"Because you itch to be up to all those masterful tricks with me," she answered promptly, without opening her eyes.

“Come, I’ve offered you no violence,” he said, with grim humour. And then, possessive because he had been defied, he stooped and kissed her on the lips.

She was off the sofa instantly and confronting him with an indignation that was not assumed.

“Don’t dare to do that,” she said, in a low voice.

“Nonsense, Sara,” Mortimer retorted quietly. “It is perfectly absurd that I have not done it till now.”

“I will not have it from you, nor Lord Prestbury, nor any man alive,—unless I want it,” she declared.

“You did not dislike it?” he remonstrated lightly.

“I *hated* it!” cried Sara.

Mortimer’s face went very white. “O, I beg your pardon, then,” he said curtly. “That is a different matter altogether.”

A swift intuition of the personal mortification her words had inflicted on him touched her to remorse. “I do not mean that you are hateful to me—your touch, your ways!” she cried at once.

“It is a matter of taste, of course,” he remarked. Standing there in the middle of the room, without any sign of emotion except a still anger, his immense individual advantages of height, well bred presence, and self-possession influenced her.

“Why can’t you let me alone? I only ask to be let alone,” Sara said, with agitation.

“Prestbury apparently has done so,” he remarked.

"I sent him away because he got on my nerves to-night," she confessed.

"Well, you can't send me away,—what are you going to do about it?" Mortimer said. For years she remembered just how he spoke those words and the way he finished lighting his cigarette, flung the match into the fire, and turned to her with an air of having so much will and personality in reserve.

"No, I can't turn you out of your own house, but I can leave you," cried defiant Sara.

"Certainly," his courteous voice changed to a note of banter. "Rather a fuss about a kiss, Sara. After all we are married, you know. But I believe every woman loves making difficulties."

At that she blazed again, "That is not true of me. I know the difference between a mole hill and a mountain. I don't pretend to grasp fully the meaning of your attitude towards me, what you want and what you don't want. The things you consider your rights and the things you consider your wrongs are your own affair, but sooner or later we shall have to come to a definite understanding I suppose. Meanwhile if you wish me to remain under your roof you had better realize that I won't *play* at love-making with you of all men under the sun!" She paused and with an effort tried to assume a reasonable tone. "Can't you see that at this moment every emotion in me is energising one purpose and one only,—to wrench from that Russian woman all that she knows about Lavretsky? Nothing else counts with me to-night."

Mortimer swore under his breath. Then he said,

“When you speak of him as you do the desire that I have to kiss you is destroyed.”

She expected him to leave the room, for his words had a ring of finality and she knew by experience that when Mortimer resolved to put an end to a discussion no second thoughts made him change his mind. It surprised her when he flung himself on to an armchair and raised the pages of the *Pioneer* between them. Uncertain of her own power to refrain from further indiscrete speech Sara went away into her bedroom.

Mortimer dropped the paper and looked hopelessly into the fire. The interview had set his teeth on edge; its tone was all wrong he felt. And till she had lashed out at him he had been so sorry for her, so achingly resentful of the condemnation she had received from Mrs. Jones and Madame Koltchesskoff. He reflected now that Sara was an intractable woman and very often her own enemy. It seemed time that he put his foot down, and refused to permit so much as the mention of Lavretsky's name again. His heart hardened.

An hour later the door opened very slowly and Sara slipped in. She had exchanged her dinner dress for a pale blue wrap that made her look young and disarming. She appeared reluctant and a little breathless, but said quite frankly, “John, I'm awfully sorry.”

Mortimer instantly felt shy. His face flushed and as he got out of his chair he said stiffly, but with immediate indulgence for her, “Not at all. It is all right. Absolutely all right.”

“Don't move, I only came back to say this,”

said Sara. He sat down again and listened to her quietly. "We seem to have very disturbed nights, John. All day you are busy and then late in the evening we have these scenes. This is the third in a week. We can't go on like that."

"Just tell me;—is it my fault?" he asked her gently and with obvious sincerity.

Sara shook her head. "You may be sure it is mine," she said wistfully. "I am the outlaw and offender all through, of course. I know that. My life with you here is a sort of truce. Can't we keep the truce a little longer?"

"Certainly, since you ask for it, Sara," he said.

For a moment she stood—fidgeting in an absent minded way with some ornaments on the mantelpiece. She was very touching, he thought, in this subdued mood. Very touching and very lovely.

Sara turned squarely to him at last and, after a long apprising look at him that seemed to reckon him up as a formidable man with whom she must deal adequately, she said, "I apologise for any personal rudeness."

"That's most unnecessary between us," he responded quickly.

"You don't really think so," said Sara, with a certain grave independence of manner. "You regard self-restraint and decent civility and a light touch on things as the way to play the game."

"I suppose I do," he admitted. To himself he exclaimed that her assurance and pride were remarkable in her tragic circumstances. 'It beats me how she does it,' he thought.

Her next sentence dumfounded him. "I tell

you, perfectly honestly, that I think you are charming. There is something about you that makes one listen for what you'll say and how you'll say it. I discovered all that when I met you in Moscow though I was an ignorant idiot. You are good-looking too." He made an awkward and half indignant movement at that, but she persisted. "Yes, personal remarks are very bad form, but I do realise that it is important to me that you are good-looking. Any wife would be proud of you, and I recognize what made me say 'yes' when you proposed to me. So you must not imagine for a single second that I shrank from you just now as one might shrink from some men. It was not that in the least. I am sorry about it." In a low voice she ended. "Considering it was you I feel that I behaved like a cad, John."

"A woman has privileges, Sara. You have never exceeded yours," Mortimer said quietly. How was this interview to end, he asked himself with rising excitement. At what distance from each other would her flattery and her intimate memories leave them? Her next words told him.

"Then shake hands," she said sweetly. Sara had him exactly at arms length once more. It was with a gently defined friendship that she took the hand he extended towards her inviting fingers which just touched his with feverish tips. Then she vanished.

Mortimer flung the window open to the cold air rushing in from the mountains. Leaning there, without any sign of chill or discomfort, he looked the out-of-door man that he was, with the hot,

artificially lit, luxurious room behind him and his eyes on the wild forbidding hills. "One has got to stand a good deal," he said, with sombre wonder.

By her mirror Sara brushed her hair, her pale arms rising and falling. "Well, that's over safely," she murmured, much exhausted. "It was the only way to gain time."

“ As the poor frightened deer, that stands at gaze
Wildly determining which way to fly,
Or one encompass'd with a winding maze
That cannot tread the way out readily,
So with herself is she in mutiny.”

SEATED on a bank that was strewn with twigs and pine needles and feathered with tiny ferns and fragile mosses Sara waited at the appointed place for the coming of Prestbury and Olga Koltcheskoff. The lofty spires of the firs that dwindled into the sky above her were not more withdrawn from the affairs of the cartroad and self-centred homes and thronged bazaar than were her dark eyes, her travelling thoughts. Since the afternoon of the picnic she had not ceased to see a river, cold as steel and splashed with moonlight, in which the dead made great gashes as they fell; and by its dusky edge an agile figure sat and swayed on a chair with the fumes of wine coursing through every vein. A fierce beast; and intermittently she had always been repelled by the animal in Lavretsky. When the sensualist had betrayed the intellectual, and instead of energy incarnate he was for a day or a night a drugged thing, without

driving power or discernment, her contempt had equalled her anger. During those episodes the murk and welter of revolution around her had become more menacing, more dense. Discipline relaxed, dishonesty increased with callous insolence, and cruelty had a baser leer. She was driven to long for the return of Lavretsky's unpoisoned spirit, and when he recovered from his orgy every condition quickly improved and bore witness to his marked superiority over his rivals for power. There was immense advantage in having him at the helm. Once more his wit, his eloquent ideals, his odd and fierce flattery, his immense hopefulness, and interest in all mystery and beauty, drew her to him so that she retained resentment only for those clever plotters who tempted him to the gaiety of drink, only for the overpowering wine itself.

But that was in Russia: she realised more day by day that to travel is to change. Her emotions had not remained stationary; her point of view was no longer the point of view of a woman in danger in a foreign land where every tradition and custom was in the melting-pot and the morale of the people feeble and feverish. 'The blood-pressure is different here,' she said to herself. 'Many who sit in judgment on me now make excuses for themselves when they are irresolute and irritable if their family doctor tells them that their individual blood-pressure is not normal. Blood-pressure to me meant assassinations, massacres, battles, executions. I have not experienced that without damage to placid virtues.'

The sound of horses' hoofs brought her to her

feet with her heart hammering. Her hand flew a greeting to Prestbury's waved hat. She saw him turn in his saddle and say something to Madame Koltcheskoff. Sara did not hear the words of greeting he uttered when he drew up beside her, for her whole attention was fixed on the Russian, who slowly approached, never turned her head, and passed on.

Something silenced Prestbury and Sara. They seemed unable to arrest her retreating figure as her pony moved away with deliberation and unconcern. "What shall I do? Tell me, quick," ejaculated Prestbury.

"Make her come back!" said Sara breathless.

"I can't—how can I?" he said, while his horse fidgeted and fumed. "You come on too, and overtake her with me."

Sara started with quick strides, hurrying beside him. "Make her stop!" she urged again.

"O-O! Madame!" Prestbury's voice assumed a note of loud good cheer. "O-O! Madame! Do wait for us!"

The Russian looked round and saw Sara swinging along by Prestbury's stirrup. She coolly stared, then turned her back and made her pony trot on rapidly.

"You can't compete with that pace," said Prestbury with a low whistle of dismay. Sara stood still, baffled and furious. "What the devil should I do now? Leave you here and catch her up? I simply hate that woman."

With an immense effort Sara carried off the situation. She put her two hands on the horse's

neck and looked up into Prestbury's face with her own grown brilliantly defiant. "Catch her up and give her my love," she said with a little impudent gesture. "She will eat out of my hand in the end."

"Not if Mrs. Jones can prevent it," he muttered, and dismounted. "I really think the jolliest thing would be for Madame Koltcheskoff to ride over the khud and go straight to the next world while I stay here and make the most of finding you alone."

"How she hates me," Sara said with a sudden horror in her voice. "I can't hate like that. Go after her, please, Lord Prestbury. I should detest to feel that anyone was rude to a woman in her position; she is so lonely, really."

"If I do as you tell me, what's the reward?" he asked merrily.

"I'm kind to my friends," she said, and made great play with her eyes.

He laughed down at her, amused, fascinated, but above all enthusiastic over the intrigue and the skill he had to employ to gain his ends. "That's a promise. Well, I'll overtake her and try to convince her that I know you better than Mrs. Jones does. Something *must* be done to prevent injury through you to John's career. Good-bye!" He rode away from Sara at a reckless gallop.

"What a stage-manager he would have made!" thought Sara, observant of the methods he employed to obtain an effective scene, a striking exit. He did not scruple to implant a sting: the knowledge that her reputation might undermine

John's position was intensely mortifying to her. The rôle she would have liked to assume towards her husband changed again and again except in this one point,—that she invariably desired to be both independent and generous. She had hoped to maintain the prestige of her fame, and by exerting its influence to cancel the power of scandal to belittle her name. Yet here was real humiliation to be faced, inflicted by two women whom she held to be her inferiors. She was vitally concerned to obtain such information about Lavretsky as would affect her emotional relationship to him, for she was bound both to the dead and to the living and found the dual bondage an intolerable strain. If she could free herself from Lavretsky's glamour she would quickly discover whether or no she wished to be set free from her marriage with John Mortimer. And until she had made her own discovery and decision she desired to deter her husband from making his. It was an amazingly difficult game to play and she felt the difficulties increase day by day. It told on her so that she found herself anxious to keep John under observation and to watch and guard against his moods. Above all she desired to avoid the irrevocable word or act.

It surprised Sara to find John strolling about their garden, for as a rule games claimed him at four o'clock. Digby was with him and she noticed that the two men moved alike, stood alike, and gave the same impression of never displaying all their goods in the shop window.

“We are keeping ourselves unspotted from the

world," Digby informed her. "The bishop is coming."

Sara stood still and flung her hands up. "How very unsuitable!" she cried.

"O, I expect he'll like you," John observed, "and that seems to me perfectly suitable. He has got to come. The Chaplain's wife says so. Her husband is down with enteric. She has just been round to tell me."

"There are hotels," Sara remarked.

"The Commissioner's bungalow is an hotel for that matter," said Digby. "Don't you funk the Bishop, Sara. He was at a preparatory school with John and was the ugliest little boy you ever saw. He is keen on mountaineering, chess, golf, and knitting. His eyes bother him so he knits stockings like mad. He lives in the Bible; knows it by heart and quotes it all the time. But he is not in the least a bore, and he is a warm-hearted man."

"I think he should have stayed with Mrs. Jones," said Sara quietly. "When does he arrive?"

"To-morrow morning," John replied. "And the Deputy Commissioner is coming up from Faujpore to see me and will lunch here, with your permission. Ali Khan is a good fellow. He won't drink anything, being a Mahomedan; and you must banish the ham. He talks English as well as you do."

It was like a tide, Sara thought, the way new lives were forever flooding in. She immediately dramatised the picture of the Christian prelate

among the Mahomedan, Sikh, and Hindu populations of the Punjab, the Himalayas and Kashmir. She, who had seen a strong church flouted and disowned, would observe this man so officially secure and strong. And at her table would sit an Eastern guest whose creed stirred unrest throughout the land he helped to administer. The Mortimers without sharing her intensities seemed to reckon fairly and squarely with all men; neither casual nor cautious.

"I believe you would give the devil his due, John," exclaimed Sara.

"Try to. Why not? Serve him right," John replied lazily. And the two brothers continued their inspection of the garden, engrossed in the welfare and culture of the flowers and trees, the repairs to the fence, and the simple agricultural skill of that brown son of the soil, the gardener Huneef. A strange man was Huneef; believed by hillmen to possess powers of healing and second-sight, and who was immune from snake-bites or scorpion stings, or the stings of wasps. He would foretell the movements of creatures, saying: "To-morrow a snake will walk there and there in the garden." His manner to his sahib was that of man to man; but knew no more of rudeness or familiarity than the great beasts of the jungle know. Sara grew absorbed in watching the contentment of the three men, their pleasure in their interests, their companionship with each other and with all the mysterious life of the earth. Of a sudden home spoke penetratingly to the heart of the wanderer.

The rest of the evening seemed long to Sara, who turned and twisted in her restless mind a dozen plans for coming to close quarters with Olga Koltcheskoff. Sara was a stranger to the real adventures of literature. She hated sewing. Bored, she took up a blue book and grew intent on facts and figures relating to the Indian Empire. She found that she read them with an insistent reference to Lavretsky's methods in Russia, and a vivid illustration in her mind's eye of John Mortimer dealing with India's problems.

Mortimer sought to avoid friction and intimacy by a pretence of reading, but he looked up once to find Sara's eyes fastened upon him. Their expression startled him. Here was the woman who declared that she still loved Lavretsky looking at him with her heart in her eyes. The silence of the encounter deprived it of definite assurance, and yet suddenly convinced him that he had a hold on this wife of his, after all. Speculating as to its nature, he put a question to Sara. "Why do you never spend any money?"

"I share in all this expenditure," she replied with a vague movement of her hand to indicate their ménage. "I mean, I get all the benefit of it."

"I'm afraid I have been rather casual," he said shyly. "Got any balance at the bank, Sara?"

"O yes, quite a lot," she told him gravely.

"Did you transfer it from London to Bombay?" he asked.

"Yes. Mr. Crumbles told me how to manage all that." She sat looking into the fire for a time

and then threw him a frank smile. "I don't consider you casual about money. I found everything shipshape for me in London. I should call you considerate and generous."

"Not in the least——" he declared, embarrassed.

"All the same I would give anything in the world to possess a small income of my own," she cried hotly.

Her temperament, her spirited face and voice, emphatically endorsed the sincerity of her avowal. He was touched by it, and felt the wound her dependence gave her. John fully realised that if she ever determined to leave him she would detest to draw upon that sum at the bank of which he was the source. "You are absolutely entitled to all I can give you," he argued gently. "You were unworldly enough to marry a poor man who could not make a settlement on you, but our income at present is not small. My life is insured for you, and Government would give you a pension in the event of my death."

She gave a queer little laugh. "It all sounds very orthodox and domestic, and I am not. I wish I could earn money myself, but I can't,—here. I could do so if I were on my own in England."

"No doubt," John argued drily. "But we are in India; and man and wife in the eyes of the law. Conditions are laid down for us. They are for everybody. I know you find much of the life here irksome, but don't restrict your personal expenditure too rigidly, or because you regard the money as *mine*."

For the first time he saw Sara show a sensitive shyness. She lifted her hands to her burning cheeks and cried out as though her nerves were all on edge. "O John, do stop talking about money and matrimony—you make me feel an absolute worm." Then, recovering, she said in conversational tones, "I can't imagine why Digby does not marry."

"Why should he?" Mortimer rejoined, and Sara, after vainly searching for a high recommendation for the holy estate, relapsed into a meditation on life's arid solitudes.

The Bishop did not make an impressive arrival the following day. On foot and distracted by the clamour of his baggage coolies he presented to Sara's eyes a sturdy dusty man in whose mislaid suit case she declined to take an interest and her unconcern struck her guest as inhuman. It was not till the lunch hour found her confronted by a composed and well brushed prelate and a towering Indian that Sara began to enjoy herself. Before all were seated her imagination was fired by the pause during which the Bishop held them silent and observant while, with bent head and moving lips and a hand—full of character—that made the sign of the cross, he said an inaudible grace. Opposite him stood Ali Khan, the Mahomedan.

Sara liked the look of the Bishop. He had a parchment coloured face with blunt and ugly features, but his countenance relaxed and expanded into the jolliest of smiles, or drew its queer mouth and funny bright eyes into the most concentrated expressions. She noticed that all three men bore

the marks of rough wear and tear such as only hard pressed manual labourers show during their prime in Europe. Certainly Asia exacted heavy tributes.

The Bishop hated to be bored. He was highly delighted therefore to find himself the guest of the Mortimers. He watched his hostess with much interest, thinking—‘now I shall see what revolution makes of an English lady.’

“I travelled up the hill with two charming women; Mrs. Norman and Miss de Vere. Have you met them, Mrs. Mortimer?” he asked.

“No, I have never heard of them,” said Sara.

“Mrs. Norman works among the widows, wives and mothers of Indian soldiers, and Miss de Vere is her assistant,” Mortimer explained.

“They are going to Kashmir for their holiday,” said Ali Khan, eagerly, well informed.

“I suppose the trouble over that case of sati has made the Faujpore division a little disturbed for two ladies to tour in at present,” remarked the Bishop.

“It would be quite safe for them,” declared Ali Khan. “They go among the military families who are very grateful.”

“I am just as well pleased that they are out of this division at the moment,” said Mortimer, and the Mahomedan despite his physical vigour and intensely masculine voice instantly echoed his superior, saying: “Just now it is a good thing. Later they can tour here.”

“Do you mean to tell me that you officials permit Englishwomen to hold important posts?” asked Sara jealously.

"O it is not all official rule of thumb in India," the Bishop assured her. "There is an instinctive spirit of adventure in British administration."

"Mrs. Norman has much sympathy," said Ali Khan with evident appreciation. Addressing the man of religion, he added, "All Indians have great desire for sympathy to-day."

"Jargon, jargon, Ali Khan," Mortimer declared with frank impatience.

"But, sir, if the British do not have sympathy with Indians, how can they give them what they need?" The Mahomedan seemed to plunge the whole of his force into each utterance.

"Yes; but could you define sympathy?" Mortimer asked.

"It is to have mercy and compassion," said the Oriental glibly.

"Put that into action," said the Commissioner. "Get it out of theory into practice,—and finance it."

Sara's thoughts flew direct to horrors in the south of India: men tortured, killed, and forcibly converted.

The big Punjabi showed an earnest seriousness that was likeable. "England has at last given scope to Indian ambitions," he said. "We educated men have now a real opportunity. Where a man has responsibility he learns much. But the Government of India must be firm. We must have peace, or we cannot develop our people and our land. We are a very poor country and taxation is unpopular. Without law and order all

progress will cease: therefore the Government should support its servants."

"Privileges," Mortimer translated grimly. "Or just the granting of petitions. There you are!"

Ali Khan gave a great laugh. "Sahib, Indians are like that," he said as one looking for protection and indulgence on all scores.

"I'm always very interested by the success of persistent petitioning, increasing agitation," said the Bishop. "Speech is concentrated energy of thought. The man who gets as far as putting his wishes into words has done more than your inarticulate fellow. He makes his desire infectious to others. If he petitions often enough he proves himself capable of sustained effort. It is admirably efficacious and praise-worthy as regards prayer, eh?"

"My people pray frequently," said the Mahomedan simply, and Mortimer nodded him a very friendly assent.

"It is my misfortune to be obliged to preach frequently," said the Bishop, "and I call it hard work. Mrs. Mortimer, as a public speaker, will probably agree with me. It is my job to be an agitator in certain spiritual matters. Not in order to disturb content—which is an active quality, akin to thankfulness, and holds the vital seed of human happiness—but to overcome apathy which is a lack of conscious life-force, a horrible thing. Indians suffer from apathy, I think. However, the Commissioner being a man of action regards words, terms, verbal contentions, with contempt, I fear!"

"It is my experience that it is difficult to make formulas function," Mortimer stated cheerfully.

"Same here," admitted the Bishop with a wry smile that screwed up his face. "Yet 'how forcible are right words.'"

Mortimer reflected that speech is not the consummation of thought or desire. Looking at Sara he meditated, "I can talk to her for the rest of my life unless she leaves me. It is not enough." The next moment he wished that he could strike her dumb.

"When I was in Russia," she fatally began, "two Indians came to confer with Lavretsky. An Irish-American from Vancouver was with them. At the interview I acted as interpreter, for Lavretsky spoke only Russian and German. The Indians seemed to me to have the most flatulent minds. They were both little fat men and very impatient for the overthrow of British rule. They said they were Hindus."

Ali Khan's eyes glittered. "And now it is unfortunate indeed for them that you have come to India as Mr. Mortimer's wife. That will discredit them very much even with their own party, for to be caught in such a trap is great foolishness."

"I have not the slightest idea what has become of them," said Sara carelessly.

"But you should inform the head of the C.I.D. of all the circumstances," the Mahomedan's harsh voice rasped excitedly.

"That is my job," said John Mortimer.

"Rather a difficult one for you, John," mocked Sara, but something in his face silenced her.

Mortimer loathed the fact that Ali Khan had learnt from Sara's lips that she possessed secret knowledge of the plans of sedition. Educated man though he was, his mind had an oriental character that made him distort and misinterpret European conduct and thought. "It is a matter of imagination. He and I would never dream alike," Mortimer reflected. He was indignant that Sara had not vouchsafed to give him this information earlier and in private, and he dreaded the interview in which he must demand to be told all that she knew, for her power to hold her tongue was a formidable strength.

When lunch was over Mortimer and Ali Khan returned to their files in the office and Sara felt herself to be in sole possession of the Bishop. The Bishop felt it too. "Nobody wants me to mention Russia, but I do all the same," she told him discontentedly.

"Nobody wants me to mention the next world, but I do all the same," he responded.

"Memory is not an embalmed corpse—mere evidence of a previous existence. It is a living emotion, a consciousness. All the British in India are fundamentally conscious of England year after year. Well, I am still conscious of Russia."

"You are with us, but absent-minded," he said kindly. And he thought her appearance provocatively interesting. Had her height been massive, her features stately, and her hair sombrely dark, the element of surprise would have been lacking; but her form seemed infinitely light, her face was pale and soft and mutable as the moon, her dancing hair

crowned her gaily. He found her expression by turns sweet and inscrutable and he wondered as to her relations with her husband. The Bishop had heard that Mortimer publicly ignored the widely circulated story that she had been under Lavretsky's protection, and that he appeared to be on excellent terms with his wife. He had also heard that Mrs. Mortimer was a 'strange' woman who showed no affection to her husband, no interest in her home. And there was a rumour that they lived together only in name.

"I want you to do something for me, will you?" said Sara. "I should like you to come to the tennis courts with me this afternoon. Everybody is there at four o'clock."

No proposal could have bored the Bishop more intolerably, but Sara's next remark intrigued him.

"At present there is likely to be rather a demonstration against me. Perhaps you might dislike that?"

"I imagine I should be inclined to resist it," he said promptly.

Digby Mortimer, seated by Mrs. Hough on the edge of a tennis court, would have been somewhat perturbed had he known that Sara and the Bishop were about to appear—for Mrs. Hough's report was not altogether a pleasant one. "Some people are adamant because they choose to believe that Mrs. Mortimer is a Bolshevik agent, and others think she must be bad because she *will* talk about that Russian man, and all that she says gets distorted and exaggerated. But I see one bright spot on the horizon: Madame Koltcheskoff now hates

Jasmine so violently that she may soon embrace Mrs Mortimer just to annoy her."

Digby gave a short laugh. "What's wrong there?"

"Everything," replied Mrs. Hough with an ample gesture. "She is an erratic sort of creature, that Russian; and Jasmine's pearls seem to have got on her nerves. She is a viper about them, and about Jasmine's comforts and security: bitter as poison. She wants things out of people the whole time; she makes use of the Jones' horses and dandy in the most superb fashion. The Judge is rather fascinated by her, and Jasmine is all on edge. I suppose the poor thing feels so frantic that she requires constant distraction, anyhow she goes in for startling conversations and flirtations. When she is with Lord Prestbury I simply walk away."

"And look at a view," said Digby drily.

"I wish you'd be serious. You know Jasmine really means mischief. Her aim is the social extinction of your fair Sara, for she thinks that if Simla heard that everybody here declined to know the Commissioner's wife they would transfer your brother. She suspects that they might be glad of the pretext after that Faujpore riot affair. If Lord Prestbury had questions asked in the House as to why Mr. Mortimer was transferred, they could state darkly that a change had been decided on for *other* reasons, and not in response to agitators' clamour. See?"

"I certainly see," responded Digby. "That is the kind of crooked game which sickens me."

"I feel so safe while your brother is Com-

missioner. If he goes I shan't trust a soul," groaned Mrs. Hough. Then she gripped Digby's arm in excitement. "Look—there is the lady *and* the Bishop. Where did she find him? Staying with her, you say? How heavenly!"

The Bishop was a little bewildered. As he paced the length of the tennis courts with Sara beside him he was aware of her tension, but felt that others were embarrassed and hesitating rather than hostile. Men, of course, raised their hats directly she bowed, and the women who failed to greet her did not definitely cut her. Where the Bishop was welcomed Sara was not markedly excluded and she swept him on without pause till, at an angle of the terrace where a narrow footpath broke away from the courts and wound down hill, she caused him to stop in response to a polite greeting from the Judge, who stood beside Olga Koltcheskoff. Thus Sara and the Russian were confronted with each other again.

From afar Prestbury, Jasmine Jones, Mrs. Hough and Digby watched the group. The Judge was flustered, Sara appeared composed. The Bishop was introduced to Madame Koltcheskoff.

"I don't see how the Russian is going to extricate herself unless she knocks Sara and the Bishop down and joins the rest of us over their prostrate bodies. She might bolt by that bridle-path but Sara would be after her like a shot. She is fairly cornered this time," Digby remarked, very intent on the scene.

Mrs. Jones, like a landslip, detached herself from other spectators and started to the rescue.

The Bishop heard Sara say, "Madame, I wish very much to discuss something with you. Will you give me the opportunity now?" Then she broke into rapid Russian.

Whether persuaded by Sara's words, or suddenly fascinated by her personality, Olga Koltcheskoff was no longer implacable and hesitated. She caught sight of Jasmine approaching and made her decision. With a polite gesture of farewell to the Bishop she turned and disappeared side by side with Sara down the narrow pathway.

Prestbury sent a tennis ball spinning up and up into the dazzling sky. Someone laughed aloud. "This will *kill* our Jasmine," whispered Mrs. Hough to Digby.

"Sara is hard to beat," was all that Digby said. He was immensely pleased. When it grew too dark to play more tennis and there was no re-appearance of Sara he escorted the Bishop back to the Commissioner's bungalow. With the reticence of their breed neither made any reference to the woman who was uppermost in their thoughts.

Meanwhile John Mortimer, alone, had walked out to Pindi Point with his mind holding that puzzling but vivid picture of Sara as she had looked at him with emotion. The impermanence of her relation to him was forever on her lips; 'if I leave you,' he could hear her say. And again, 'I still love Lavretsky.' He pondered over her repulse of his embrace: how could he explain that in relation to her swift and sweet amends? And the ardour he had surprised in her eyes later? He remained

baffled and at a loss. To him it was impossible to *wink* at her relations with Lavretsky. He was sure that Sara had begun to resent the terms on which she lived in his house. Yet she also resented his kiss. But she had explained that she would not *play* at love with him. It must be all, or nothing, then? He agreed there; but 'all' was not possible while she hugged her secret and proclaimed her love for another man. How was he to destroy that love and obtain a disclosure of her secret, if she hurled anger at him when he caressed her, courted her, was tender to her? Suppose she broke away from him altogether; ended their story, obtained her freedom and demanded her liberty? It was an unendurable thought. He considered the practical difficulties; the foreign environment of India, her lack of a private income. He felt that Sara was growing physically stronger and recovering her nerve: he feared that no material advantages would weigh with her. He thought it possible that she might suddenly depart to England, financing her journey by drawing on the money with which he had supplied her, but repaying him proudly the moment she earned an income of her own. Would she make use of Prestbury to regain her freedom? He thought not. As regards Prestbury his jealousy and anxieties had decreased. But anything might happen if he drove Sara too hard, if he antagonised and challenged her. Nevertheless, on his return to the bungalow he *must* ask her searching questions with regard to her disclosure at lunch. Fate was against him. He stood for a long time looking down at the vast dun plain spread out far

below him : earth visible and tangible but all human clay hidden ; a mystery. There were millions of lives concealed down there and he was responsible for their welfare, their peace. John Lawrence and many another Englishman had ruled them. It was a great and romantic story. And now he, John Mortimer, took the wheel for a time. It was his turn. Certainly he must ask Sara that necessary question, no matter what he risked of personal happiness.

Indian bungalows are built to satisfy, not to baffle, curiosity. Noises that proclaimed domestic routine soon informed the Bishop as to where lay the room of the master and where that of the mistress of the house. First he heard Sara return : he thought he heard her crying. His ears told him, though doubtfully, that she had flung herself on her bed to weep. He was very excited about her. She had shown him qualities of initiative, resource, and concealment : qualities which are developed during concentration on means to escape. It had struck him forcibly that such was her present concern ; an escape. From what ? That was the puzzling thing. From scandal ? It would dog her far he thought. Her face, her personality, could not easily give it notice to quit. From the past ;—had they a hold on her, those strange Bolshevik powers ? Or from her present position, from John Mortimer himself ? The Bishop missed the gaiety that once had been conspicuous in John. Disaster seemed impending.

He had seen a good deal of the Mortimer brothers when on leave in Gulmerg during 1913, surrounded

by the old type of sahib. He thought of them together as a unit, a family; and had he been obliged to describe them he would have said that they revelled in the jolly strength and sheer fun that animated the lives of young officers, that they enjoyed with zest the irresponsibility and grace of light-hearted women, that the gravity and the beauty of children attracted them, and that the loyalty and courage of horses and dogs was a thing they found lovable. He judged them to be interested, absorbed, and satisfied by the generous magnificence of wild nature, the tranquil loveliness of gardens, the mysterious vitality and happiness of healthy animals, the chivalry of arms, the innocence of affection, the dignity of tradition, and the ideals of honour. They did not talk a lot, but they were an amusing pair. When the Bishop had thought of Digby during the war, it was as a very trusty and well-beloved gentleman: it did not surprise him one whit that he had not obtained big plums, for his personality would have more fitly earned a nickname,—such as Richard Coeur de Lion has borne through long centuries,—than his career have been summed up by a collection of decorations. Digby struck the Bishop as being a man with firm ground under his feet: country, family, sound purpose. But John Mortimer had seemed to him the ideal lover: not a weak drop of sentimentality in the fellow, and a capacity for the embodiment of romantic love such as nature demonstrates in a chosen few only. The Bishop had felt incapable of patience with a woman who failed to appreciate marriage with John Mortimer: never-

theless he admitted that Sara did not irritate him. on the contrary he liked her. She was a surprising young woman. On the way to the tennis courts she had said, "I enjoy men's companionship, you know. I admire their ways, their grip. I like the absence of sorcery in their looks: no art, no face powder! A man's face is like a bare weapon: you encounter its force—phew!" And she had placed her hand on her heart with a spontaneous gesture. Possibly she was not susceptible at the points that find most women impressionable, but if she could feel like that how was it that she and her husband were on such strange, such tragic, terms? 'I ought to be able to help them, but I shall come and go as a guest, not as a priest, in their eyes,' groaned the Bishop, when he heard Mortimer return to the bungalow, move about his room, and then go to his wife's door and knock. There seemed to be an argument before the door was opened.

Mortimer, crossing that threshold for the first time, was interested in the aspect the room wore of home and intimacy. He was struck by Sara's heavy air of melancholy, all her usual animation had departed. She had been lying on the bed with her face thrust deep into its pillows, and now she sat on its edge and greeted Mortimer as an intruder.

"What is this urgent matter?" she coldly enquired. "I am really in no mood for argument. My head is aching and I have got to entertain that Bishop of yours at dinner, so please do not upset me now."

"I won't worry you long," Mortimer replied.

“ I must question you with regard to those seditious Indians of whom you spoke at lunch. I am sorry you mentioned them before Ali Khan.”

“ Why? Is he not in your confidence as an official? ” Her unconcern was maddening.

“ Yes; but he is not in my confidence, nor am I in his, about women. You aroused his curiosity in yourself. He’ll not let the thing alone in his mind. He’ll regard you henceforth as a political personage.”

“ And am I not a political personage? ” She looked down at her slim feet slowly swinging to and fro, and a sad little smile played on her lips.

“ Not as my wife in India——” retorted Mortimer. “ And never a secret service agent.”

“ Secrecy—there was always something secret about me,” she murmured. “ For years it was a secret that I was an Englishwoman and your wife. I am rather sick of secrets; but if you want me to keep things dark I can.”

“ I know that you love mysteries,” he replied.

“ I loathe them,” she answered with a tragic look at him.

“ Then clear this up for me,” he persisted. “ My position is impossible if you withhold knowledge of official importance. What dealings did you have with those two Indians, who were they, and what were their plans? ”

She spoke as one who makes a portentous statement and he listened with anxiety. “ I do not remember their names. One ended in ‘ Dutt,’ the other was miles long and I forgot it in half an hour.

Their dealings were with Georgeovik, and his sister gave them several interviews because she entertained wonderful hopes of a shower of Indian jewels. I heard of them vaguely. Do you imagine I could wish to meet seditious Indians? I was pretending to be an American; do you think I desired to meet one who might ask me awkward questions? But one day I was caught. Suddenly—like that——” she opened and shut her hand. “The Indians were keen to establish touch with Lavretsky, as they had had dealings with his wife and brother-in-law. He avoided them for a time: I don’t know why. Then he gave in, and sent for me to act as interpreter. Nothing interesting was said: nothing definite nor indefinite revealed. It was a futile affair of flattery, and abuse of the British rule in India. That’s all. I possess no information.”

“I have your word of honour for that?” Mortimer asked slowly.

“Yes.” Then Sara raised her eyes to his and said, “But if I did possess information, what then? I had Lavretsky’s confidence and trust: it was the price of my life. To have shot him or the Indians, to have tried to convey the information to Allied Missions—that was a clear course to pursue. But to have accepted my own safety . . . and now reveal what I then learnt? Would that have been an honourable word. . . . I wonder.”

“The enemies of England are your enemies——” he began.

Sara interrupted him violently. “Good God, do you think I require to be taught that?” And

she added to his mystification, "To-night of all nights!"

He watched her for a moment in silence and asked, "Would you dislike to remain up here alone for a fortnight?"

She replied eagerly, "Now? I should like it."

"Ali Khan is a good fellow, but Hindu animosity has been aroused and professes to believe that he is not impartial. The situation seems to call for my presence in Faujpore. But there is fever in the plains which makes it advisable that you should remain here."

Sara nodded. "That's settled then. Do you go to-morrow?"

"Early in the morning."

"It is you who disappear this time," she told him. Undoubtedly his decision afforded her relief. Mortimer felt terribly lonely as he left her room.

Sara looked very ill at dinner and scarcely spoke. In the drawing-room the Mortimers found the Bishop's presence a safeguard against disputes. He was a giver, not a taker, and made no demands but sat and knitted busily, a sturdy stocking growing under his efficient hands. He stated that he loved the Punjabis. "They are *men*. Cruel, brave, courteous, and often kindly. It is a wonderful peasantry living on an iron soil. Very patient people; very domestic and ceremonious. The administrator they require is one who shall 'deliver their souls from falsehood and wrong, and dear shall their blood be in his sight.' That is where the

Englishman is their godsend. He has the truth in him. He does not feed them with lies and blindfold them with superstitions. And he does not regard them as cheap life. As for political agitators, who mislead them in the name of religion, the Old Testament hits them off exactly. Over and over again it presents pictures of the kind of situation which you find in India to-day: 'The Lord gave the word; great was the company of the preachers. Kings with their armies did flee and were discomfited, and they of the household divided the spoil:' every agitator in India claims divine commands; with an illiterate population preachers rather than pamphlets spread sedition, whose aim is to overthrow the Emperor of India's government by seducing Indian troops from their devotion to him. And there is no doubt that the idealists who lead, and their adherents who press them on, would loot the resources of this land to some purpose. I've dropped a stitch."

"It's a puzzling world," said John Mortimer.

"We are all fools while we dwell in these houses of clay," said Sara. "Wisdom lies on the far side of death. That makes me tolerant."

"Houses of clay," repeated the Bishop. "Yes, we are queer tenants and the terms of the lease are a mystery. A very definite limit is temporarily imposed. But these physical homes of ours leave us free to long for adventure beyond their walls. God has a wonderful attraction for mankind." He made an odd figure sitting there, so square and ugly, and giving concentrated attention to the picking up of the stitch he had dropped, while his

clear voice made no glib utterance of his thoughts, but produced them with effort and conviction.

“God is the soul’s *raison d’être*. There can be no other,” said Sara sombrely.

Mortimer marvelled at the spiritual earnestness she displayed for that brief second. The Bishop seized upon it. As Sara rose and gave him her hand, bidding him good-night, he said with a flash of impressive power, “Mrs. Mortimer, ‘guard well thy heart, for out of it are the issues of life.’ ”

For a moment she stood looking straight at him ; her eyes frank and courageous. Her hand touched her breast—“Ah—my heart ! ” she cried, as one between hope and fear.

It was startling, touching. While she left the room the two men stood, dumfounded.

“ I protest
Maugre thy strength, youth, place and eminence,
Despite thy victor's sword and fire-new fortune,
Thy valour and thy heart,—thou art a traitor.”

THE Bishop left early, without seeing his hostess. John knocked at her door and she called, ‘ Good-bye.’ He repeated the knock and she said, “ Wait a moment.” Then she opened the door to him, her hair falling about her shoulders and her blue wrapper held close about her.

“ I’m off,” said Mortimer lamely.

“ So I supposed,” said Sara. “ Well? ”

He stood awkwardly on the threshold. There were two things he might do : keep his distance to a nicety and look rather a fool while Sara held him at bay, or assert himself and risk offending her. He chose the latter course. His two hands fell gently on her shoulders and he pushed her a few paces back into her room, following her ; and closed the door behind him with his foot. “ Now Sara, listen——” he urged.

“ Yes? ” said Sara.

“ I am in love with you. You tell me you are in love with Lavretsky—— ”

“Don’t!” she cried, and dragged his hands from her shoulders.

He thrust them deep into his pockets, and continued quietly. “That situation can be indefinitely prolonged if you decide to remain here, or in Faupore, as my guest. My most welcome guest, Sara. But you once jeered at me that the position I maintain towards our marriage is a farce. I don’t like carrying that word ‘farce’ down the hill with me. It hurts infernally. Tell me what Lavretsky has been to you—don’t keep up this attitude of its being solely your affair and none of mine. For that is sheer wilful nonsense and not worthy of you. Tell me, Sara.”

“Sooner than tell you at this moment I will leave your house,” she replied; trembling, but not with fear. It was the tremor of a flame.

“You mean that?” he groaned.

“Cannot you see that I mean it?” she said wearily.

“You prefer to continue—this farce?” He tried to read her face, which in its mute rebellion was not cold nor hard.

“Give me time,” she said. “I do not play with unrealities. My silence is the silence of growth, development, change. I am not yet ripe for a declaration.”

“But you can tell me what has been——” he urged.

“Not yet,” said Sara. “I will confess all, or nothing.”

The house was full of the noise of his luggage being moved and he felt that his moments with Sara

were numbered and were futile. "It means little to you that I still love you?" he demanded.

"Am I so great a fool?" she retorted. "If you hated me, what would become of me?"

"You could still carry out your threat to leave my house," he reminded her.

"But I should have no choice," said she shrewdly.

"Sara," he said hoarsely, "I am only human. I warn you marriage is no farce with me."

She gave a quick startled look around her, drew back and said in a light tone, that fell as a douche of cold water, "I like you well enough to continue this conversation another time, but it is useless for us to start an argument just as you are about to depart."

Her words were nothing; it was her manner, her effort to rally her forces and cool his rising passion, that gave him pause. He seemed to see her thus beset in Russia. At once he yielded to her and conceded her wish. "When you join me in Faupore then," he said. "Meanwhile look the thing in the face, Sara. See it as it is. I love you. But I won't be made a fool of by Lavretsky: I must *know*. If you remain silent and secret, don't jeer at me that I maintain the attitude you call a farce. I press you to speak the more urgently that such pressure would be intolerable if it were repeated forever. We have been together nearly six weeks, and I find my patience exhausted."

"I have been thinking, feeling," she told him earnestly. "I am not just as obstinate as a mule."

"Every time that I plague you to speak I re-

proach myself afterwards for having been a tactless fool," he said. "But when I remain silent my mind seethes perpetually with words that *might* influence you if I uttered them."

"I am bewildered now," Sara said, pushing back her hair with feverish hands. "Are you proclaiming an ultimatum? Do you tell me to speak soon or——go?"

"No," his voice was tense. "Certainly not. I am asking you to play the game by me and speak. But my house is your house for as long as you will stay with me." He took a restless pace up and down the room. "I would cease at last to question you. I don't know if it is possible to make a success of that sort of relationship, but I would try."

"It would be doomed to failure," Sara said in a low voice. "And it would be unfair to you. O, I'd find some other way out. . . ."

He feared that most of all, and said hastily, "For God's sake, Sara, do nothing decisive until we meet again in Faujpore. Don't let me get a letter—a word—a message—to say you have packed up and gone. Promise me that."

"I promise." She gave her word so readily that he felt all the peace of a reprieve.

Looking at his watch he said, "I must go now," and was surprised by her sudden step between him and the door.

"Swear that you won't kiss me—or anything!" she said.

"I would not dream of touching you," John Mortimer replied with grim humour.

"Then—wait." She went to his side, her hands

seizing his arm, with one little noiseless movement. Then her head fell against his shoulder and she stood there, with closed eyes, scarcely breathing. Her fingers found his and clasped them.

"Sara!" he said very tenderly—to be baffled by her whispered, "You swore. . . ." When she raised her head he saw that her eyes were dim. She left him and went to the window.

"It is very difficult to leave you, after that," John said tentatively.

"If you are wise you'll go," she replied in a strange voice.

A thought intruded itself upon him,—was this a cat and mouse game that Sara played? That hardened him to reply, "It is my job to go. The emotions of Faujpore are my business, you see. So for the present good-bye."

At the door he scored. Speaking with a lover's manner he cried, "Good-bye, sweetheart!" His departure was a spirited affair, as though he had gained the mastery of that woman by the window with her air of tears and fire, but his heart was heavy with doubt.

John was not the only traveller to Faujpore. Though it was very early in October some British regiments began that day to march down from cool camps to feverish plains. Bullock carts had crawled towards the cantonment all night long and from dawn innumerable mules jingled through woods, past little streams and cascades, down to the dry dust and parched cactus hedges. Englishwomen and children with household gods followed their menfolk. The clamour of swarming coolies rose

from compounds and broke the peace of every path. This change had come suddenly as though an ant heap had been disturbed, and Sara found herself stationary and alone.

All that day her house seemed strange to her without John Mortimer. It was uncomfortably beset by little disorders. Kalyan Das moved about as one depressed : his air of worry made his quiet flittings impart a spirit of unrest. Respectful and industrious the old man failed to prevent a noise and unpunctuality which had oddly begun. The Mahomedan cook's strident voice rang out from the mud kitchen and was reinforced by the loud tones of the khitmutgar, who appeared to be spoiling for a fight. Huneef, crouching among rotting leaves, muttered furiously. Now and then the high-pitched voice of the sweeper hurled defiance from a distance. Sara realized that with the departure of Mortimer government had been withdrawn. She instantly asserted herself. Summoning Kalyan Das she said, in the Urdu she had studied but never spoken, " Let there be silence."

A withered brown hand shot up to a snowy turban in an obedient salaam. But though the harsh voices died down for a time, sounds of a smothered quarrel persisted.

The day wore on, its routine running roughly. When the khitmutgar brought in tea he gave notice. He and the khansamah must depart to-morrow, he said.

" Why? " enquired Sara, observant of the man's truculence, behind which she suspected some diplomatic purpose of his dark mind. She could not

unravel his reply. Kalyan Das was a good man, she understood him to say, but the Hindu sweeper was disobedient to Kalyan Das and an impossible person for self-respecting Mahomedans to deal with.

“ Well, go to-morrow,” said Sara indifferently ; and the khitmutgar went from her presence an incarnate grievance.

Sara’s eyes were heavy, she looked like a woman exhausted by some mental effort. The pallor of her face was startling ; not merely colour but some secret essence of vitality had ebbed away. She was strung up and the anger of the servants got on her nerves : it reminded her of the undercurrent of rudeness and wrath in Russian households before the storm burst. The discontent in her compound seemed to hem her in and to penetrate into the bright room where she drank her tea, from the garden where night had already fallen. A night from which many a gaily lit window had been withdrawn.

Presently a swaying lantern illuminated the verandah, followed by Olga Koltcheskoff in Mrs. Jones’ dandy. She tapped on the glass of the door and Sara admitted her with a surprised welcome. “ Ah, but you are very well here,” said the Russian, looking round her appreciatively.

“ I wondered if you would visit me to-day,” Sara murmured. She showed a glowing sweetness to this guest.

“ But of course I came,” announced the other delightedly. “ I said to myself, ‘ I have given pain ; now I will give consolation.’ ” She made

little luxurious gestures from the depth of an arm-chair ; cuddling the big cushions and stretching her hands towards the fire. Then she ate sugared cakes and drank strong tea with a curious air of enjoying material things intensely and giving great importance to them. After she had lit her cigarette her small eyes shone from her sallow face with immense vivacity. A plain woman, she had no thought of apology such as Englishwomen seem to proffer when they lack beauty : she was perfectly self-confident and certain that her sex distilled charm.

“ And now I will tell you much,” she cried, but observing Sara’s face set she broke off to exclaim, “ No, no, my poor dear, I will not speak again of that man. Yesterday you asked for information and I gave it ; to-day I am here to amuse you, so I speak of that Jones. Last night she made me a frightful scene.”

“ Because of me ? ” Sara asked.

“ Because of you, and of the Judge who is always English gentleman and charming to me. Because of every man who looks at me, and because of the French manner in which I bring up my baby instead of her foods and her flannels. But she is altogether impossible. That I use her dandy is to her an impertinence—and I her guest ! Well, now—to begin my tale. Last night she reproached me that I made her look a fool. She said, ‘ I have told everybody that you decline to know that woman—and why. But this afternoon you go off with her, intimately, for hours.’ I replied to her, ‘ You should now tell everybody that I am Mrs. Mortimer’s friend—and why.’ This was after dinner

when she has the habit of playing patience and never a word spoken. I die there of boredom, I think."

"How did you explain the change to her? A change is so difficult to explain," said Sara.

"My dear, I said to her—'I understood from you that Madame Mortimer is a woman whom all find outrageous. When I met her and she announced to me that she had been the secretary of Lavretsky I said to myself—This is too much! I will not know one who profited by the protection of Lavretsky. That was my first decision. Then I wearied of my own anger. She had beauty and my interest was roused. When we talked I found that her life, like mine, had been at the mercy of Jews, Intelligentzia, and hired assassins—Chinese and Letts. That she had starved like me, with all those little cramps in the stomach and the queer noises in the head. That she had known the dirt, and the crawling things that dirt breeds. Did that touch my heart? Not altogether. But when I discovered how she had been deceived by that clever man who fascinated her, then we became friends, she and I. For we Russians know that women love of necessity and because love is blind. If it is a Lavretsky—ah well, that is fate!'" She blew a little puff of smoke into the air and watched it hover and fade. "The Jones did not understand me very well," she added with a laugh.

"She did not believe you," Sara drily explained. "She regards foreigners as beings who never behave naturally."

"Yes, yes," affirmed Olga Koltcheskoff ex-

citedly. "Her very words were as you suggest, for she exclaimed over and over again, 'But it is not natural to change like that!' I replied to her, 'Madame, I find that in life everything changes. I was rich and now have nothing, my relations and friends were powerful and happy and now find poverty and protection in other countries: society, land, laws, all gone forever. I, who have experienced that, am still young. Do not speak to me of the impossibility of change.' But I talked to a fool."

"You spoke as a Russian, you see," said Sara, dreamily.

"As a Russian refugee to the rule Britannia," the other crisply remarked. "But you understand me perfectly, I think. You too have suffered and it remains to make your life anew—to change, yourself. I have helped you in that." She addressed Sara with intense interest; voice, hands, face, all eloquent and energetic. "From yesterday your *marriage* is your affair. It is of the greatest importance that you should establish yourself. A child—yes, that would make all secure. And I do not pity you, for I find that husband of yours altogether charming and distinguished. Position, money, and your youth; see, you have *all* the cards! All the cards right *in* your hand." She held out hers with bloodless fingers widely extended, and then clenched them. "That is your fate!" she cried, "and this is mine; empty, nothing." She showed her bare palms and let them drop; her whole frame relaxed and she appeared utterly listless.

Sara animated her guest again like a wind that stirs a fallen leaf. "No, no. You have experience and intelligence. You are an attractive woman of the world. You will love again and marry again."

Olga responded at once with renewed vivacity. "You think so? But that would shock your Meeses Jones more than all." She laughed gaily. "Yes, it is desirable. To be alone in this fearful world is too hard for a woman. But in marriage much is required besides love. One must have a *ménage* that is suitable. To possess pearls again—sometimes I dream of it. And to love is exquisite, is it not?" she breathed softly and a smile passed over her colourless, well-bred face. "I have always found it the greatest distraction from anxiety. Without its pleasures how could I have endured the worry while my husband was at the front, and during the revolution when all security was lost? But now you and I must be wise, my dear friend. It is certainly my intention to marry well."

"I should like you to marry Lord Prestbury," Sara said in sudden mischief.

The Russian gave her a sly look that was as suddenly antagonistic. "He is rich, but I think he is all yours for the moment, hein? And I depart. They drive us like the cattle. To-day I receive my *congé* from your Indian Government and we are to go at once to Vladivostok." She shivered violently. "Without warm clothes! Ah, now at last we shall die like all the rest, my baby and I!"

Sara cried, "No. That is absurd! All that

you require must be found. Will you excuse me for a moment, Madame? ” and she vanished.

The Russian, left alone, let her eyes wander in cold scrutiny over every object in the big room. Then she watched the door in absorbed anticipation.

Sara returned with a soft moleskin wrap thrown over her arm. “ It smells horribly of camphor. I have never worn it, you see. My brother-in-law told me that Punjab winters are cold, so by good luck I bought it—and now it is yours.” The passion to rescue, always strong in Sara, was a-flame, and Olga Koltcheskoff had the temperament which accepts as easily as it spends. The costly fur changed hands without exacting an effort from either woman.

The Russian was wrapping herself in the coat when Digby Mortimer entered. She instantly stood in an attitude that displayed its lines to advantage. In her intense physical content she might fitly have purred, and her pleasure seemed to appease some stinging emotion in Sara.

Digby enjoyed his half hour with the two women, and his personality with its blend of benevolence and grit stimulated his companions to be charming. In his opinion society was a comedy: if it was exaggerated into farce it deteriorated, he thought, and tragedy knew nothing of society’s fictitious values and dwelt apart. He was not astonished that these women had banished it from the drawing-room. The essence of their drama was a blood-feud, a thing familiar to him since as a young subaltern he had made the acquaintance of the Pathan of the North-

West Frontier. He had extended his knowledge in Somaliland and Mesopotamia and Persia, in Ireland, and in trenches in France. He had discovered that among the superficial ink quickly obliterates blood-stains, while among the simple a personal touch often heals wounds inflicted by weapons of war. He wondered by what art Sara, the friend of Lavretsky, had won Olga Koltcheskoff, whose father Lavretsky had done to death, and he profoundly rejoiced at the pact between them: it removed a great danger to John Mortimer's career. When the Russian left Digby was not unprepared for the mixture of triumph and gloom with which Sara confronted him. 'Ever since that picnic she has been bracing herself to receive a shock. She has had it right enough now—smack in the eye,' he said to himself.

"I want to talk to you, Digby," Sara announced, standing on the hearth-rug. He looked up at her from his armchair. "I am not very good at repenting, or regretting, or explaining, and I am not in the mood to talk much. But I want to tell you something."

"Well, why not?" said Digby.

"You know the code of honour which you and John consider essential?" she said slowly. "I was brought up in the same code by individuals who could not express it in terms of adventure or public service. It is possible to make a big thing of it, but the women in my home did not. Yet it was there—and one respected it as a law without a policeman to enforce it. O yes, I felt—I have always felt—that honour is a tremendous romance.

In Russia it was elusive, once the army broke. I chose to imagine that Lavretsky possessed the spirit, though not the letter, of our code. Remember it was not possible for me to discuss him with others. I could not obtain information about him. People, regarding me as his intimate friend, were too cautious to speak ill of him in my presence. We were all intimidated. I met him in a train as a sick man in authority. I knew no more of his past than the name of the station he had started from. But some of my instinctive doubts did not sleep well."

"And Madame Koltcheskoff has confirmed these doubts?" he suggested, as Sara seemed to hesitate.

"Yes." He saw she was deeply angered. "I know now for certain that Lavretsky fooled me. That does not prove that he was without the big qualities I admired: qualities that exert an influence and cast a glamour. I am not altogether a fool. But . . . He was not worth the tribute of a memory that dominates everything else. I mean to be heartwhole again."

"That is good news," Digby said quietly.

"Is it?" Sara spoke with a strange coldness. "He died loving me. I shall live, not loving him. There is nothing ideal about that."

"My dear, you are a romantic dreamer," he told her.

"I am a hero-worshipper!" she cried.

Digby thought, 'she never spoke a truer word. It is the key to her whole temperament.' He rose, knocked the ashes out of his pipe into the fire, and said, "Then we must find you a hero, eh?"

“ And I am such a fool—— ” she quiveringly confessed. “ Such a Sara White, body and soul, so permanently shaped and set by class tradition, so incurably insular and British, that in the long run the hero has to have the code of honour of an English gentleman—even if it does not represent the changeless laws of heaven ! ” She laid her head upon her crossed arms which rested on the mantelpiece. In that attitude she dismayed Digby by a muffled command. “ Don’t repeat a word of this to John.”

“ I hope you will tell him the whole story yourself,” Digby said. When she made no response he spoke sternly. “ You are treating old John damned badly in my opinion. He is too gentle with you. It has been Lavretsky this and Lavretsky that for six weeks, and far too much of your parlour-Bolshevism.”

“ That’s right. Hit me when I’m down,” she said, with her face still hidden.

“ I hit you when and where I can reach you,” Digby replied without remorse. “ How would you like to lose John? A man gets tired of mysteries, Sara.”

She turned to him and gave a nod of assent. “ Yes, I know. But I have not lost John. I have lost my reputation. And in case you think that Olga Koltcheskoff has saved me from scandal, let me inform you that she told Mrs. Jones that she took me to her arms out of sheer sympathy with passionate love.” Her brilliant eyes danced.

“ My God ! ” said Digby briefly.

“ Olga Koltcheskoff does not understand me in

the very least. We should never feel nor act alike, she and I," Sara added.

"I don't understand you either," he said.

"Then don't condemn me, Digby," she pleaded softly. "At least don't blame me for the colossal things. What individual responsibility have I for all the mad business of war and revolution?"

"I suppose we men have made conditions very hateful and hard for you," he admitted. "Well, I'll depart in peace, Sara."

"You Mortimers aim at nothing less than peace *with victory*," Sara remarked to his broad back.

“ The transient sorrow you cause me now
Will fade away in the distance dim,
But Love is a God, and I wonder how
You will make your peace with Him.”

SARA'S dinner was carelessly served that night. The khitmutgar's white clothes were soiled and his turban was not trim. A dozen trifles signified disregard of her displeasure, so that she grew tense for some definite sign of disrespect. After he had brought her coffee to the drawing-room she listened to his footsteps retreating from the bungalow as though a hostile purpose might direct his every movement. A little later sounds of someone approaching on stockinged feet challenged her nerves to a highly strung consciousness of being an Englishwoman alone in a house with Asiatic men-servants. But old Kalyan Das on entering the room saw nothing but dignity in the composed manner of this white woman, dressed in white and with a halo of light in her hair, who turned the light of her pale countenance upon him with a flash that penetrated his slow mind, which was susceptible to

the moods of the sahib-log whom he had served for thirty years.

"Protector of the poor, I have a petition to make," began the aged brown man. "Did the Presence inform the Colonel Sahib that the khan-samah and khitmutgar have taken leave and depart to-morrow?"

"No. To-morrow I will engage new servants," Sara answered.

"As your Honour pleases. There are many servants in the bazaar, but they are not good men. By your Honour's favour I will go now and make a report to the Colonel Sahib who understands all things."

"Very well," said Sara.

Kalyan Das salaamed and withdrew. The house was very still. Sara seemed to feel the vast chain of mountains rising all around her; dark, solitary, and aloof. She tried not to think of India, nor of the mysterious unrest in her compound. She wanted no more spells cast upon her mind. For years strange peoples, theories, and perils had beset her with all their strength, and she had long struggled to elude their baleful influence. But for Lavretsky she would have been successful, and now she was almost free from him. She realized without flinching that she had not emerged from the clouds of suspicion with which the minds of others enveloped her. She thought, 'I am a woman with a story and everyone tells themselves that story differently. When I tell it I shall be called a liar.'

Sara proceeded to picture herself telling it to

John Mortimer, when to be believed would be vital. Her speech would be the breath of her life then, lived with an intensity which it set her body and mind tingling to contemplate. Her narrative would be to her an adventure more poignant than the experience that evoked it. As time can only be interpreted by action and not by words, and as description is transformation, she could not disclose seven years to him. Yet her story, without repeating her thousand acts in unnumbered hours, nor telling of things seen, things heard, things imagined by her, would represent the result of all, so that her final act of speech would be the climax of a series of thoughts, emotions, and impressions; paramount in turn but fugitive. 'They are active now only in my mind. They are immortal only in my soul,' thought Sara.

Lost in reverie she yet held to her resolve to let her plans mature for a while in her mind. She instinctively knew that she must accumulate mental energy for such an enterprise. Words did not leak from Sara Mortimer like an escape of gas from a meter.

Her meditations were disturbed by the sound of a pony's hoofs and Prestbury's voice summoning a servant. A look of cool disdain lay on her face while she heard him vainly repeat his call. The ragged watchman, blundering about like a bat, croaked something dreary. The disorganisation of her household was complete and in exasperation she dragged the curtains aside and opened the French windows.

“ My servants have gone mad,” she announced.

“ That is because John is away. I hear he went down the hill this morning. Is Mrs. Mortimer at home? ”

“ Yes, I suppose she is,” said Sara.

Prestbury dismounted and gave an order to the syce who led the pony away. Pip followed Sara into the room, then shut the window and drew the curtains close, while she watched him with an unfriendly smile. He walked over to the mantelpiece and looked deliberately at the clock; its hands pointed to twenty minutes past ten. Taking Sara's impassive wrist in his grasp he touched each of her fingers in turn with an air of immense enjoyment, saying rapidly, “ This little pig went to market and this little pig stayed at home, this little pig had bread and butter and this little pig had none. John went to Faujpore and you stayed at home, Digby is playing bridge at the Club and Pip Prestbury has come. Well, you know why he has come.”

Sara gently disengaged herself and sat down on the sofa.

“ I love that dress you are wearing,” said Prestbury; his manner was lightly caressing. “ But you are looking rather sedate, you know.”

“ You are paying a very late call, Lord Prestbury,” she said.

“ It is never too late to mend, and we've been deplorably dull till now. Besides I'm calling on the one woman in Murree who has escaped from conventional leading-strings,” he declared with gay enthusiasm.

“ O, I don’t take orders from the clock,” Sara remarked, “ but you are just a little free and easy, aren’t you? ”

It was a difficult thrust to parry, but Prestbury looked the very picture of a duellist ; alert, self-confident, deadly keen. “ Free? I’m your slave. Easy? You are the most difficult of women to hold. You wicked little devil, you ! ”

He uttered the words with infinite zest and flattery, but Sara, with her head resting on the back of the sofa, murmured in disconcerting tones of boredom, “ You don’t imagine I shall snatch such chesnuts as those out of the fire ! ”

Prestbury, unabashed, cried with swift mirth, “ Been called a little devil too often? I don’t wonder.”

Sara sat up and said with energy, “ Look here, I know exactly what you are about to say. You are going to point out that officials in India are frumps—including John. Then you will tell me that I am as different from other women as night is from day, and that you are the one man who understands and appreciates me. I have observed your line of approach. And I daresay you cherish your own theories as to what I have done and what I would do. But shall I tell you one thing I have never done to a man? ”

“ Never treated him ungenerously,” Prestbury said quickly.

“ Never deliberately made a fool of him,” Sara declared. “ I think you had much better bid me good-night at once.”

Instead he took the chair opposite her, and leaning forward with his hands loosely clasped between his knees, fastened his lively eyes upon her. "Don't be such a kind good woman, darling," he urged.

With a bitter little laugh Sara relaxed her attitude of vigilance, and watched him with detachment while he let a tactful silence give a softened intimacy to his presence so close to her.

Presently he began with an air of candid good-humour, "I swear I'd never term John a frump. He is one of the men who count. Only he makes rather a point of being shocked, doesn't he? That is his affair, of course."

"I thought you called yourself his friend," she said critically.

"I would not hurt his reputation for the world. I would not make him unhappy. . . . But he'd never know." Prestbury dropped his voice. "Nobody would know. I love you, and my infernal boat starts in six days. I am the one who stands to suffer."

Sara nodded to indicate that she had seen his point of view.

"Come, Sara," he urged passionately. "You aren't in love with John, and you are disillusioned with that Russian bounder. He only fascinated you during a social delirium. I swear I can make you believe that you've never loved before. The present,—that is the only precious thing. It is all that we ever possess really. We are mad when we fail to make the most of it."

"And then you'd go away," she murmured.

"Because I must," he said hurriedly.

"Leaving me here, the picture of injured innocence?" she said, strangely mocking.

That puzzled Prestbury, as did the scornful enquiry in her eyes. He treated her last word as though a sphinx had jested, and he cried, "You are the last woman in the world whom I would injure. I admire you more than you guess, and I am certain that you will make a big thing of your life. You are a big soul already. O, I am ambitious for you, just as I am ambitious for myself. Do you think that I'd presume to ask you to play the fool? No. One perfect hour; that's our fate, our prize."

"How you revel in life," Sara exclaimed.

Prestbury had been growing more and more conscious that she was analysing him and not responding to him. Under the strain he felt that he was losing his head. He said to himself that Sara Mortimer was like wine, there was a quality in her that had sparkle in it; her very beauty was colour, was light; and her personality infused his spirit with an illusion of strength, and a warmth of feeling mingled with an acute sense of pleasure. She imparted to him something that confused his judgment and overpowered his will. He said, hoarsely, "Not always. There is all the grind and the bore of it. But you mean joy to me. The more I'm with you the more you attract me. Don't be cruel, Sara."

Quite unmoved she asked him steadily, "Do you imagine that I am in love with you?"

“No!” Prestbury burst out. “No, you feminine mystery. But I think you are generous, adventurous, adorable.” He crossed the hearth-rug and flung himself on the sofa beside her and pleaded, “Be kind to me, you beloved woman.”

Impervious, Sara rose and said gloomily, “I suppose you won’t believe me, but I tell you that all this jars intolerably.”

“Jars—but why?” he cried aghast.

“It is so mean. It is so furtive. It has neither grace nor valour,” she replied, as though she parted unwillingly with some intimate and secret thought.

“If you mean that, I’ll go,” Prestbury warned her. He was incredulous and stared at her blankly.

“Of course you’ll go,” Sara retorted. “This scene has gone far enough.”

“As far as the half-way house,” Prestbury said cynically. “The half-way house you ladies are so at home in.” He confronted her with his passion turned to anger. “I wish I had met you in Russia,” he said in gay cruelty, “but I hope I may never see you again as long as I live.”

“I think you might risk it when I am sixty or so,” Sara said coolly.

“Ah yes, that’s sixty below zero. I should not burn my fingers then. So it is good-bye till we come to years of discretion.” He was too skilled an antagonist to betray signs of defeat or dismay. He looked at the clock once more and remarked, “It is only a quarter to eleven. You are just

twenty-five minutes to the good, Mrs. Mortimer. And we have been as good as gold, haven't we? I wonder why."

Sara remained obstinately silent, and Prestbury as obstinately lingering put his back against the mantelpiece and assumed a scornful air of worldly wisdom, saying, "You are wise, of course, for life is frightfully difficult in your position. All this sort of thing endangers a public career and you have to play your cards prudently. If you can count on keeping your head you are lucky. As for me, you first dazzled me and now you've sent me spinning. You are a very calculating lady: 'Heads, I win; hearts, you lose,' is your motto. If I may presume to criticise, I think you have made some mistakes; all that fuss with Olga Koltcheskoff and Mrs. Jones and so forth. It has not done John any good, and I see that you regard him as your trump card now. I daresay you are right there; anyway you've been clever to-night." He dragged his shoulders away from the mantelpiece and asked in a very different voice, "Shall you forgive me?"

"No, I'll forget you," Sara replied with arrogance.

Giving an exasperated jerk to his whole frame he exclaimed to the world at large, "Lord! she is word perfect!" and then in anger took his debonaire person out into the night.

Sara spent wakeful hours while faint lines traced themselves on her sensitive face, and she thought, 'I represent to Mrs. Jones a traitor and a rake; to Olga Koltcheskoff first an adventuress and then just a weak, scheming, worldly woman; to Pip Prest-

bury a mistress of men ; to the Mortimers a wife with a shocking history. And each casts me for the appropriate part and anticipates the appropriate word and deed.'

“Langour is not in your heart,
Weakness is not in your word,
Weariness not on your brow.”

NEXT morning Sara had a sense of crisis. Her compound was early astir with all the fuss of argument, hesitation and anger. Kalyan Das brought her Prestbury's cigarette case on a salver, saying, “The Sahib left this behind him last night,” and she felt that his late visit had exposed her to the suspicions of her household. The thought brought a wry smile to her lips. She was very much disposed to stick her nose in the air and scoff at the opinion of these obscure brown men who observed her daily life as witnesses without accuracy or comprehension. Yet she understood that the communities to which her Mahomedan servants, and her high and low caste Hindu servants, belonged were powerful because indispensable. The vital conservancy work of each municipality required the co-operation of the sweeper caste whose contaminating tasks no other Indian would perform. Homes, hospitals, schools, hotels and prisons were dependent on those men. The waterman, washerman, groom, cook

and sweeper were exclusive folk, guarding their own spheres of influence, tenacious to preserve the public opinion of the land that regarded all acts by which they carried out their duties as presumptuous, or derogatory, in any but themselves. Kalyan Das was a high caste man : the frost of life's winter had touched his hair with grey. The ancient creature had experience, and his mild old face was demonstrative of that sagacity which violence never possesses. But his wisdom knew nothing of tolerance. A grandfather and the husband of three young brides in turn, he was now an aged widower much concerned with the marriages of his grandchildren; affairs of shrewd bargaining and endless negotiations, prompted by deep family feeling and an honourable sense of duty, and directed in every detail and principle by the rule of caste. Birth, death, marriage, the ceremonial of every act, the partaking of food and drink, rigidly conformed to that imaginatively fantastic conception of humanity which has evolved the most conventional of codes. His activities, carried out with his air of conscientious fidelity, were strictly confined to what was appropriate to a man of his caste. The care of valuables, the valeting of John Mortimer, the dusting of ornaments with dusters reserved exclusively for his use, the announcing of visitors, the serving of wine, the superintending of other men's tasks; such were the services this illiterate old Hindu offered the community in return for a monthly wage which enabled him to feed and clothe himself and all the dependent women and children in his family. No poor law relief, no old age pension, no

unemployment doles were available if work should fail Kalyan Das. And not a female relation of his might work for hire; each one must make an orthodox marriage within the caste when she ceased to be a child. Not for him were the ways of the Mahomedan servants, who handled the food of the Sahiblog, even beef. But they, as Indians, shared his contemptuous view of the low caste washerman and the untouchable sweeper, with their shrill voiced, barefaced womenfolk. Kalyan Das was benevolence itself in his manner to Mithu the sweeper, who in the early morning swept the compound and the floors of the bungalow, brushed the dogs and deftly caught their fleas, and after meals had been served received into his bowl a miscellaneous collection of scraps left on plates or in dishes. He was a prosperous person, but such scraps were his perquisites and he would not be denied. His hand might not touch the plates, cooking utensils, forks and spoons, beds or baths of the Sahiblog, nor his fellow servants' goods and chattels. He worshipped the same gods as Kalyan Das, but with a different and squalid revelry. Mithu was by temperament the jolliest servant in the compound. His home lay in a sweeper village where he ruffled it with the best of them and had three little sweeper sons. And behind Kalyan Das's mild equanimity towards him and his persisted the *idée fixe* that his personal touch was contamination, his women unmarriageable, and his posterity doomed to the immeasurable inferiority of the sweeper-caste world without end.

It was all this strangeness that made the anger in

her household a sinister thing to Sara Mortimer. A conflict of ideas might carry humanity to any lengths as she had learnt to her cost. She pondered over the vital difference between what she thought of caste, and what Kalyan Das and Mithu thought *and felt* about it. They felt such conviction on the subject that they gained social recognition for their views. They imposed themselves on the world as high caste and low caste with all they chose to imply by the distinction. Yet, in spite of this Indian conservatism, the changes sweeping over India like a storm made for so much variety in political opinion, and so threatened the stabilities of law and order, that the exclamation most frequently heard on all lips was, 'How things have changed!' This was the more deeply interesting to Sara that she herself had been under the influence of a revolutionist, an agitator. Now, like any reactionary, she turned away from a knowledge of deeds which no words could glamour for her any longer. She wanted to see India escape massacres.

Sara looked out of her window on to drifting clouds that made the October morning in the mountains a thing of shine and whiteness, of swiftly-moving intangibilities, of sudden vivid disclosures. How to communicate with India? That was the question for peacemakers. The unconquerable isolations of the vast land were staggering. Transport problems were enough to break the heart of any living creature save the birds of the air. Sara knew her blue books by heart; her mind kept tally of thirty-six thousand miles of railway. Except on those rails, and where fifty thousand miles of

metalled roads saw motors scatter dust on greying leaves, nothing outpaced the slow movements of a country-bred pony, a shuffling little ass, a swaying camel or a plodding bullock. Darkness had no other lamps than moon and stars for jungle folk, and so at night country tracks lay obliterated till the dawn disentangled them for wayfarers. The eastern sun called a halt for long daylight hours during many months, while in the monsoon heavy rains by a thousand devices refused bridge and ford and highway to the traveller. The size and sorcery of India challenged comparison with the greater area and strange savagery of the Russia that she knew. It was impossible to guess what over three hundred million human lives signified in terms of suffering and laughter, violence and inertia, hunger, hate and love. Millions said to women with their beauty and their lure—‘vanish; be visible only to father, son, brother and spouse.’ Millions turned to animals and reptiles,—bulls, cows, crocodiles, cobras,—and acclaimed them as holy. Surely it was a morbid population; re-incarnating error, exhausting vitality. Wherein lay the margin of safety? Could the two hundred thousand police in British India control crime? Simple, ill-paid Indians, half of whom could not read or write, guided by one thousand men of higher rank. Sara could not accurately remember, but she thought there were seven British cavalry regiments, and about forty British infantry battalions, besides artillery units and tank battalions and squadrons of the Air Force, scattered throughout the plains and hills, the forests and jungles; out-

numbered as regards cavalry and infantry by Indian soldiers. Could any situation be queerer, harder to know? For in the cities and villages, moving like chessmen on a chessboard, were the busy brown agitators propagating hate.

And all this day-dreaming with India as the incalculable element was no more outside the heartbeat of her emotional life than is the storm remote from the emotions of the sailor's wife, or the summons to the raid a matter of unconcern to the outlaw's woman. For John Mortimer was committed to the fortunes of India for better or worse.

Sara winced from Prestbury's jeering remark that John Mortimer was now her trump-card. She preferred Olga Koltcheskoff with her idea of life as a mere vivacity of the senses, in which poverty was the greatest ill. She knew that those two would never believe that simplicity was not the characteristic of a simpleton.

Sara had arrived at the point where she had become definitely an adherent of John and Digby Mortimer in India. She now believed in their capacity for dealing with any emergency after a fashion that profoundly satisfied and stimulated her love of high adventure. She had an instinctive knowledge that the Mortimers would be first rate men *to the last*. As regards prestige and official power they were not sheep in wolves' clothing—the type she most detested. If it were true that 'for a man to seek his own glory is not glory,' they were unscathed by that acid test, for both were patriots. No one was infallible or invincible and at some date their day would be over, their influence on the

affairs of mankind diminished; she thought they were certain to accept the challenge of the years with dignity, for it was not only in this life that they had hope. She said to herself firmly, 'The Mortimers are the superiors of the Lavretskys and Koltcheskoffs, the Chunder Bōses and the Prest-burys. I've got that clear now. I *prefer* them. Well, that settles things for me.'

Just as she had come to that momentous conclusion Digby walked in, looking half amused and half angry. "A storm in your domestic teacup, Sara. I've taken the liberty of settling it."

"What on earth was it all about?" she enquired.

"Did you see a little boy here yesterday? No? Well, he is your khitmutgar's nephew and he trotted in to bid his uncle good-bye. The sweeper was brushing the dogs, and on his way out of the compound the youngster stopped to tease the fox terrier and the sweeper gave him a smack with his broom." Digby chuckled. "The boy told his father when he joined him by the tonga office, and his father's friend took word of the outrage to the khansamah in the bazaar. The khansamah brought the matter home to the khitmutgar and that queer creature Huneef worked them up. The crux of the matter is the striking of a Mahomedan by a sweeper. That's a dire insult to the Mahomedan community and the boy's relations will have to pay a fine to their fellow Believers for having lost prestige. Feeling has run very high. But it is all settled now."

"I have no idea how one would settle it," said Sara.

"What—not after six weeks in India? You're no good as a politician, Sara." He smiled down at her. "The khansamah and khitmutgar don't want to leave John's service. They gave notice in order to air their grievance. They did not want trial by combat with a sweeper, but they did want justice for their pockets in the matter of the fine. That's where I came in. In John's name I've directed that Mithu shall have the sum stopped out of his wages. He might depart to-morrow and get another place, but he does not wish to. He'll stay with John and stump up. So much for the question of finance. As regards the insult, Kalyan Das has just administered a shoe beating to the sweeper in the presence of the Mahomedans and now everyone is satisfied."

Sara was very scornful. "I can understand the satisfaction of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth," she cried, "but what possessed that great hulking sweeper to submit to a blow from little old Kalyan Das?"

"Generations of low caste men and high caste men have bred sentiments which made that seem natural enough to Mithu," Digby remarked carelessly. He added, "It is a small incident, but it illustrates the difference between the claims to racial equality put forward so adroitly by politicians and the emotions that caste and religion stir in the unadvertised, inarticulate Indian."

"What a country!" exclaimed Sara, aghast.

"Those in authority here should always demand

visible signs of respect," Digby affirmed, "but to continue powerful they must preserve the dignity of the poor and insignificant. It is a difficult job. At present someone is stirring up trouble among the sweepers in the bazaar. I hope you'll not be inconvenienced, Sara, for I find I have to go back to my regiment to-day. The man who was commanding during my leave has just died of cholera and they will bury him this afternoon. The telegram tells me that the regiment has several other cases, so we shall go out into cholera camp. It is the custom for British officers on leave to rejoin."

Sara had seen humanity's impulse to stampede in panic, and to fly from cholera. She opened astonished eyes. "A custom? A queer one. You expose more lives to infection."

But Digby defended it. "The more the merrier is not the theory exactly. I suppose the idea is to have and to hold in sickness or in health: it is not rot really,—for officers and men. But you need not be anxious about John as there is no cholera in civil lines. Stay here till fever is out of the plains. Another fortnight will make all the difference."

As he was about to depart into the valley of the shadow with that fastidiously cheerful air of his, a strong impulse made Sara check him on the threshold with the words, significantly uttered, "Lord Prestbury was here late last night, alone."

"O, is that the fashion now?" Digby remarked, quite imperturbable. "You women get great fun out of changing the conventions, don't you? Pip went down the hill early this morning. He is an

amusing fellow, but he overrates himself. Your sex's fault I imagine."

"Digby—I suppose my reputation is awful?" she blurted out.

He made patterns in the dust with his stick as he remonstrated with her awkwardly, "My dear girl, you are a celebrity!"

"What do they say of me here?" she persisted.

"That you are good-looking, unsociable, indiscreet. You have some warm friends. The Bishop thought a lot of you. I expect he will knit you a jumper; he is a priceless fellow. Mrs. Jones, as you know, is not enthusiastic: but then she is very far-fetched; Jones got her from Southsea, I believe, or some such region," he tried to laugh it off.

"But in their eyes I'm——" Sara began.

"John's wife," Digby interposed quickly.

"Ah, not Cæsar's wife. Give a dog a bad name, you know. This dog's bite is worse than Lord Prestbury expected. That's all. I thought I'd tell you as you are going down into an epidemic."

He looked more furious than she had anticipated, for the Mortimers liked to disguise their feelings. "If I had known I'd have wrung his neck for him, Sara," he said.

"I imagine you and John knew he was like that,—it is his reputation," she said coolly. "Well, he thought I was like that too; it is my reputation also."

But Digby would have none of it. "You are his friend's wife."

"O, he and John don't really like each other now," said clear-eyed Sara.

"He is a rotter. I never wanted him about," growled Digby.

"Because you thought it a risk after what you had heard of me in London," she said, steadily. "But I'm not a casual, smart set, sort of woman. I am under John's roof and I am honest."

"I am certain of it," said Digby gently. "But not a very frank lady."

To that she answered, "I have been escaping for years. During an escape one is not frank. Do you call a fugitive's disguise false in a mean way? When I am free I'll be frank."

He left her on the hilltop where life was departing, crowds withdrawing, and leaves falling. It would have amazed him beyond measure had he guessed that she saw his return to his sick comrades as a shining thing, bright with British honour.

"Only for man, how bitter not to grave
On his soul's hands' palms one fair good wise thing
Just as he grasped it! For himself death's wave;
While Time first washes—ah, the sting!—
O'er all he'd sink to save."

JOHN MORTIMER returned to his bungalow from Major Joyce's funeral. The dead man had not been intellectual; he had lived for all sorts of organised pastimes, football while young, later polo and golf. He had liked being on club and cantonment committees. During the war he never left his regiment except to go to hospital, and he had talked a great deal about 'muddles.' No quartermaster had ever satisfied him, and no man ever ran the mess quite to his liking. He had dined in mess and died at dawn. There was no muddle at his funeral in the evening, though all arrangements had been made by Major Downs whom he always regarded as a muddler of the first water.

Mortimer, following the corpse of what had been yesterday an intolerant, warm-hearted, mediocre man—brave as a lion—was struck by the spirit of tolerance expressed by the highly organised ceremonial. British officers lowered the coffin into the grave and British soldiers formed the firing party,

but Punjabi Mahomedan, Sikh, and Dogra officers were present and a crowd of sepoy's from Joyce's regiment had gathered just outside the cemetery. There was genuine regret among those Indian officers and soldiers. The big Major had been loved. He had been a character. And in the wide charity of that manly farewell Mortimer recognised the universal sentiment that here at any rate there was nothing to oppose, nothing to resist. At the end, when the poignant notes of the Last Post had died away, Mortimer noted how Downs' face relaxed and he responded to the Commissioner's greeting with a gravely satisfied, "I think it was all right."

Mortimer left Downs, Ali Khan, and the Cantonment Magistrate discussing precautionary measures with regard to cholera. Riding home he passed the thundering transport of a British regiment that returned to Faujpoore from the hills. In the distance the shrill gaiety of a tune the marching men whistled tingled in the still evening air.

A couple of hours later Digby arrived, considerably annoyed that an accident to his motor had prevented him from paying a last tribute of respect to Joyce.

"Was it all right?" he asked his brother.

"Yes. Very well done. A most stately affair. The Indian officers and a lot of the men turned up." John jerked his head towards the plains. "Out there are all your men's kith and kin : rustics tied up in village life like knots on a slack string. No discipline, no snap in them : rough and ugly and incoherent. My job. In cantonments your

Indian officers looked as smart as paint. Your job."

"Good," said Digby. "Poor old Joyce. He was a sound fellow and the men liked him. They confided in him quite a lot."

John said slowly, "Faces are impressive things. They were all quiet in the cemetery, like men watching by a sleeper. Nothing combative; no one on the look-out for a chance to score. Yet not listless nor meaningless at all; every man was trying. I've never seen that expression in council in all my life. It touched one rather: old Joyce gone out of the competition, not giving any more orders, not criticising or arguing about anything again—just gone. And all four races sorry about it; gentle and sorry. Two of your Indian officers were crying. There you are,—that's an Indian regiment while loyal. Nothing to get out of it; their own sahib, and they cared for him. That's all there was to it. Let agitators say what they may, those fellows like us."

"Yes, I know," responded Digby, his mind suddenly filled with crowding memories of affections that an Indian regiment breeds and tests and proves. "Well, I hope we don't get many more funerals. Any other cases to-day?"

"Joyce's orderly, Downs said."

"That's young Kirpa, a Dogra," said Digby in sharp dismay. "A great lad and keen. Bad news. His father was havildar-major and was severely wounded in France. This will about kill the poor old man."

John grunted sympathetically. "You are

lucky," he said presently. "You get the real human relationship in a regiment. I've four million people in this division and living or dying we don't get as near to each other as you soldiers do. But I hope to God I don't have to shoot any more of my fellows."

"Things pretty quiet?" asked Digby.

"All on edge," the Commissioner answered. "That mad widow very nearly put a match to a powder magazine when she burnt. Religious feeling is very tense in the villages that came to blows in August. And the city has a strike every five minutes. Anything may happen." He turned his vigorous worn face to his brother and quietly stated, "If it is all to do again I failed two months ago. If they got the right corrective then they won't repeat their violent challenge to law and order yet awhile. I have never thought life a cheap thing. Your sepoy's don't hold it callously cheap either, and they regret the death and departure of a sahib. I got that clear to-day when Joyce went under the sod. It took one away from the jargon of press and debate, it took one out of these office files. It heartened one immensely."

"That's right," said Digby. He had seldom found John so expansive.

"Mind you, we've made some big mistakes, but we've had bad luck. That influenza epidemic, long years of heavy war casualties, the high prices and poor monsoons, shook the Punjabis. Yet it is still a mystery to me where and how the enthusiasm for us evaporated. For I was here, as a guest, for the armistice celebrations and the whole place was pay-

ing homage to the British Raj spontaneously. There was a great military ceremonial and at its close the city fathers salaamed the Flag. Every street blazed with lights and fluttered with decorations. The Commissioner drove through the city at night and was smothered in garlands. A tremendous feast was given by an Indian citizen to hundreds of wounded Indian soldiers who tramped in from their villages. The Commissioner and Deputy Commissioner and I went to it, and I've never seen anything so impressive as that gathering of stalwarts : poor, maimed, but indomitable. All those upturned dark faces when the Commissioner addressed them in the vast dim tent were like the very shadows of battlefields. Their enthusiasm for victory was deep. Their ambition for the King knew no bounds : they wanted him to assume sovereignty over Germany and Russia. They shared our pride as victors, but the rich city men poured thank-offerings of money for charities and welfare funds into this office as an oriental homage to power. . . . And that's only three years ago."

"Re-action seems the inevitable law," Digby remarked. "India is in an appalling state to-day."

John got up and began to light his pipe. "Dine with me here, Digby?"

"Thanks. I think I'd better dine in mess and keep things cheery. I looked you up first as we shall go into camp to-morrow."

"Come back again after mess," John Mortimer suggested.

To Digby this seemed an extreme measure. He

had been here and there all day, and tedious arrangements awaited his decision when he should reach his quarters. A refusal seemed due for decency's sake : one simply did not do the extreme thing. But his brother amazed him by urging him to return, saying, " Come back. I'm damnably down on my luck."

" Right, I'll be here again about ten o'clock," Digby said, and left hastily because John's appeal was almost emotional and therefore acutely embarrassing to them both.

When they met later the October night was cool and moonlight shone livid on dark thorn tree and parched palm. The two brothers sat in John's office which was stripped of its punkah and endowed with a carpet and curtains for the winter. Its loftiness and size gave the room dignity. John's first question was, " How's Sara? "

" In servant difficulties," was Digby's unexpectedly flat reply. He gave John a brief account of the incident.

" Perhaps she had better risk fever here and join me," John remarked.

" Rather not have her with you? " Digby asked bluntly.

" Things were getting on my nerves up in Murree. I was required here, but in any case I think I should have cleared out for a bit," John replied.

His younger brother looked at him shrewdly, and said with a frank laugh, " You have always cleared out when people got on your nerves, you know, old man."

John stared his surprise. "O, because I was bored and didn't want a fuss or a scene. You don't suppose that is why I left Sara the other day? I left because I found she might be up and off for good unless I got out of her sight for a bit. This time it was I who would have an infernal scene every hour if I could."

To this astonishing announcement Digby said quietly, "That's bad."

"I want to monopolise her," Mortimer confessed with bitterness. "I want to keep on asking her why the devil she can't care for me. I want to explain to her that I am this or that kind of man. I want to unload all my egotism on to her. It is not fair nor decent. I have a grievance when she is not interested in me. She agitates me continually."

Digby smoked in silence for a while and then remarked, "I never saw you show a sign of all that."

The other snorted. "It is fatal to show a sign of it. I can put myself in Sara's place and see how it must exasperate and bore her. It is not her fault that she fascinates me while I leave her cold."

"It struck me that you left her in peace," Digby rejoined. "Do you remember the Draytons? I often wondered how Mrs. Drayton endured Morris Drayton. He treated her as though she were a criminal imbecile: always thought she was going to say the wrong thing or take the wrong line. He never let the poor woman make up her own mind as to whether she needed her umbrella, or would raise the nurse's wages, or should accept an invita-

tion to tea. Devoted to her, but gave her no rope at all. Now Sara is perfectly unself-conscious and entirely her own mistress in your house."

John broke in; not irritably but with a restrained agony of mortification that was rather heart-breaking in Digby's opinion. "I daren't try to repress her. It is a case of hands off."

Digby looked for a moment into a chapter of his own life that he determinately kept closed. Ten years ago he had become engaged to a pretty worldling. Those were the days when top hats were the body and soul of fashionable life in London streets and the social comedy took itself very seriously and commanded the attention of a genuinely interested audience. Digby had not been quite 'smart' enough for the girl. She had a soft spot in her heart for him, but no soft spot in her head. There was a period when, in order to keep her, Digby Mortimer desired to be a peer of the realm, a millionaire, a man in a smart regiment. He had too big a bill at his tailor's. He sweated over tips. He wished he knew certain notable people as intimately as she did, or even better. It did not last. She danced away with a 'good match' and passed out of his life. He recognised her for the light being she was, but some quality in her still appealed to him. Women of her type always attracted him. Her exquisite and luxurious clothes and jewels, her young loveliness, her zest in all pleasure, had a charm, an enchantment, for his senses. Her worldliness was an intensely strong thing. She excelled in all that made the selfishness of society supreme. In her

own way she was as difficult to influence, to win, and to hold as Sara. Digby had failed, and he thought, 'we are not good at choosing them.' He wondered why. Beauty swayed the Mortimers too much perhaps, or that undefinable force personality. Unconventionality in a woman, if it was not a pose, provoked in them the divine folly of love. John Mortimer had read reams in the press about his wife and Digby Mortimer frequently came across gorgeous photographs in the illustrated papers of the woman he had hoped to marry. Scandal made merry with the name of the society woman, but had taken Sara very seriously. The tone of a certain gay set had inspired his betrothed; its trivialities had bewitched her just as completely as tremendous events had cast their spell on Sara. And the Mortimer men were helpless to avert a publicity which they detested for their wives, or the women they desired to marry. 'I adored a will o' the wisp and old John worships a flash of lightning. I don't see either of us jogging along comfortably,' mused the soldier. Then, being an optimist on principle, he said aloud, "I expect Sara will settle down in time, you know."

"What d'you mean,—settle down?" demanded John in ironical tones.

"Settle down and have babies," Digby baldly asserted. "Grow devoted to you and learn to play golf. Ask your advice about everything and never take it. Want to know if you think her as good-looking as she used to be. Behave like other people, and forget Russia. She can. She is not a Russian. She has only got to make the effort."

John Mortimer's laugh was bitter as he replied. "Yes, I want that sort of thing, I suppose. Sounds dull enough, but it is what I am hankering after." He looked both strong and tired as he added, "I can't relinquish her. I planned a life with her and nothing else will do instead. But I believe she merely likes me. That's fatal, of course."

Digby could not see himself or his brother as 'the Mortimers'; he could not get the point of view of the Dearloves, the Houghs, the Jones, the Bishop,—or Sara. He could not detach himself and exclaim with them, 'that's just like a Mortimer.' Still less could he say of John as many a woman had said, 'he is attractive in the way that all the Mortimers are.' But he did say in all simplicity, "I have not found women indifferent, John; have you?"

"No," said the other impatiently. "But that has taught me what intolerable demands a would-be monopoliser can make. The Monteiths for instance—You know I used to stay there a lot and then there was a break? It was that sort of thing. The girl and I were great friends for a time and then it became perfectly ghastly. I honestly don't think it was my fault. I'd never made love to her. Never wanted to. Then suddenly I saw: I think that she meant me to see. After that there was no peace and no freedom. Every word she uttered or repressed was intended to have an effect on me. It was an obsession. And instead of touching me it irritated me beyond endurance. I funk'd a scene for her sake and mine, but she would have one.

Then I vowed I'd never go there again and I didn't. If I were to persecute Sara in that way she would be up and off like a shot."

"All the same," argued his brother, "Sara is not indifferent to you, and I swear you don't bore her."

"I don't bore her when I talk to her as I would to a man," shouted John. "What's the good of that to me? She is not a man. But she tries to understand and analyse the qualities that make force in rulers and in the masses. Her interests are the same as mine very often. I should love all that in her if I were not so utterly sick of seeing her waste her deepest feelings on public affairs. Public affairs be damned."

"Don't tell me that Sara prefers a blue book to a love letter. I'll never believe it," grunted Digby.

John made a furious movement to indicate a pile of novels that lay on a table close to him. "That's the latest modern thing about the drama of sex, or whatever you call it," he said quietly. "I take it that the authors are thoughtful men and women, so I have been reading their stuff in order to obtain their point of view. No good to me. I'm stiff, Digby; that's what's the matter. I'm stiff. I have experienced a number of strong impulses to say this or that—brutally—to Sara: I repressed them because I have an attitude towards women. Towards a lady, possibly: and my wife. An attitude: a stiff thing. I feel a swine if I am not scrupulously polite to her, if I refer in plain language to her relations with Lavretsky. And yet, heaven knows, I make it plain enough that I

can't swallow the thought of it. I detest the idea of rubbing it in—but I won't dodge it. The people and ideas in those novels seem to me fantastic, superficial. But if Sara shares their free and easy views it will end in her leaving me."

Digby thought it positively unbearable that John should feel himself so confined and controlled by his code. That code had become part of himself, his second nature, and was both his strength on which all might rely and his limitation of which the unscrupulous or rebellious would take advantage. The picture of his brother's handsome, formidable face, humbly bent over the pages of fiction's love-intrigues in order to see if his own romantic, robust ideals stood condemned as narrow-minded by the inspired conceptions of scribes, made Digby wince. After a long silence he asked, "You don't want the mere satisfaction of hearing Sara *confess* to indiscretions, I suppose?"

John made an explosive sound that indicated the outrageous folly of Digby's suggestion, and Digby laughed. With a grim smile and feeling in his pockets for matches John said, "The pomposity of pronouncing a pardon, and all that sublime superiority, eh? Well, hardly."

"Then, in a word, what exactly do you demand from Sara?" Digby asked gently.

"Information. I can face a thing like that Lavretsky business, but I won't sneak past it. It is sheer insolence to be silent to a husband, to imply that it is no concern of his, to suggest that a man will accept that kind of uncertainty about another man." The fighting animal was visible in the

darkened pupils of John Mortimer's sensitive eyes.

Digby nodded sympathetically. "I see. I imagine I'd feel the same in your shoes. After all you are not the man in the street. You've got responsibility. There's the thought of children . . . yes, I see." He got up to go. "By the way, Sara has won over the Russian woman. I found her giving away fur coats right royally. That same evening, being in good form, she sent Pip Prestbury down the hill with a flea in his ear."

"Good," said John, and in deepening satisfaction repeated, "Good. I daresay I never do Sara justice."

"She asks for trouble," Digby remarked. "Well, the night's still young, but I have a certain amount to do. I am glad we have had this talk. Things have changed considerably since August. Sara has not simply marked time, I know. Good-bye, old man."

"Good-bye, and keep fit," said John. It was their only reference to cholera.

John accompanied Digby to the verandah and looked up at the serene moon. "The night is young and we are not; that's the miserable truth," he said with his deep laugh.

"Not too bad yet; forty is active enough," Digby said cheerfully. He was all eyes for his new polo pony, beautiful and mysterious in the moonlight.

"Don't you remember what twenty thinks of forty?" retorted John Mortimer.

"Twenty does not know. Sara is thirty-one

and knows better," Digby said as he mounted and rode off.

John stood stock still, lost in contemplation of the polo pony which he watched, absorbed, till the night swallowed up the animal and its rider.

“Clown: ‘Look you, the worm is not to be trusted but in the keeping of very wise people.’”

A FORTNIGHT passed; a fortnight during which Digby Mortimer's regiment marched across the plains to shake off that swift death that haunted it like a malign ghost. There were not many cases of cholera, but for the first three days every dawn and twilight saw the burial or the cremation of a soldier. And like a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night the officers' British spirit led their brown men. By them sanitation, medical aid, and games were organised. They possessed the strong common-sense that makes the best of a bad job, that makes a study of direct action, that makes control a guardian not a gaoler, and which can sojourn in the wilderness and neither run to seed nor perish there.

Sara, alone in the hills, looked down on the plains spread like a carpet at her feet. She had grown aware that by the age of thirty-one most sheltered British women have been able to assimilate the few vital experiences of their youth; courtship,

marriage, motherhood, and lawful adventure—even the rough shocks and sorrows of the war—whereas her years were still too few to have matured the effect of those strange hazards of her heart, those extraordinary enterprises of her mind, which had been forced upon her in foreign Russia. Not having died of it she was crudely alive. She both knew too much and had too little learning. She had been the victim of chaos and now slowly, laboriously, day by day, she put her house in order.

The cantonment of Faujpoore, eight thousand feet below her, was at last filled to its brim with British and Indian troops. Bungalows, hotels, and government quarters were crammed with men, women and children, their uniform cases, perambulators and dogs. Indian and Parsee tradesmen began a winter's roaring trade and contractors in the city were busy men. The cinema gathered hundreds of spectators every night and there were dances at the club. Motor bicycles panted, and motors dashed along the mall. Those who lived in cantonments seldom saw the city; the race-course, the golf links, the tennis courts and the grounds where polo, football and hockey were played drew all the English people out into the air. Brilliant sunshine poured down upon the carefully swept roads and compounds from a cloudless sky. The whole place was punctual, industrious and festive. It illuminated its streets and houses with a thousand lamps, while the great surrounding solitudes gloomed in darkness. It was served by countless men on pattering bare feet, and by slow

moving kine coming in to be slaughtered or milked, or transporting food stuffs. Trains brought it merchandise from afar: French silks, port wine, face powder, pillow cases, tinned peaches, cigarettes. It lacked nothing. It was armed to the teeth. And British energy animated the whole of the enormous place which stretched for treeless miles from a brown undulating woodland to a black tossing ridge piled with squat barracks. It blazed and blazed with polish: there was immaculate polish on the chargers, on the men's kit, on the band's instruments, on the guns' mountings, on the brass work of motors. When the cantonment daily cleaned itself and its weapons it did so with a fond and anxious care like a tom-cat licking his fur. While it swallowed soap and polish as so much emulsion its dark neighbour, the city, drew in dust through every door and window as an ancient dodderer might take snuff through his nostrils. Yet though sun, wind and disinfectants attacked microbes in spotless Faujpoore, the hospitals overflowed from ward to verandah and hundreds of soldiers lay sick of the usual autumn malaria.

In the Commissioner's office sat John Mortimer and with him were Tudor, the civil surgeon, Gallespie, the cantonment magistrate, Thoyts who was on the staff, and Mills the dentist. It was an informal gathering.

"My sweeper cleared out the first thing this morning," said Mortimer lightly.

"No sweeper has been near my compound since our man fed the dogs last night. Not a soul. My

wife, an English nurse, three children, myself and eleven Indian servants with their families are living in my compound—and no arrangements; nothing,” shouted the dentist. He had just arrived on his bicycle and his solar topi had left a red mark on his perspiring forehead, while clips fastened his flannel trousers round his thick ankles. He was cross, fussy, and ineffectual, and the other men regarded him with cool aversion because of his untidy heat and flustered wrath.

“I have a multitude of sick, British and Indian; both sexes and all ages. Some have dysentery. I have not a single sweeper to carry on the work to-day,” growled Tudor, fastening a sardonic eye on the dentist who had but lately arrived in India. “There were three or four sick sweepers in hospital who were convalescent enough to lend a hand in a crisis. I ordered them to do what they could and they decamped. Staggered away there and then.”

“The sweepers are saving their souls. They’ve been got at,” said Mortimer.

“There’s not a sweeper in barracks,” Thoyts remarked cheerfully.

“There’s been no conservancy work whatever done in the whole cantonment,” rapped out Colonel Gallespie, “and I see no prospect of any being done. My man had been with me eight years and left like a bird. The people in the bazaar are helpless and there was a case of cholera there last night. That’s number one.”

“It is a most extraordinary state of affairs; a social paralysis, that’s all I can say,” ejaculated

Mills. His dissatisfied air plainly indicated that he held authority to account.

“The foundations upon which rest the health, comfort, and dignity of rulers have crumbled,” remarked Mortimer. He tilted his chair back and looking up at the ceiling gave a low whistle. “The worm has turned,” he added, not scornfully.

“Something must be done at once,” clamoured Mills. “These men cannot be allowed to expose us to humiliation and epidemics. The good of the community at large should outweigh every other consideration.”

“There’s no alternative Indian labour available. They must be sweeper caste,” explained Gallespie briefly. “Get your reformed councils to change all that if you can!”

“Civilization—good Lord, *where* is civilization? Here we are, pandering to the superstitious prejudices of the uneducated,” groaned Mills.

“Not only the uneducated,” interposed Thoyts quietly. “And in a cantonment like Faujpoore the sweeper receives far greater toleration than elsewhere. In an Indian state I could not have my reception room swept by a sweeper, as the high caste men disliked entering a room which his presence had polluted. Here, a sweeper who professes Christianity gets taken on as a table servant very often by men in the British service. His wife is used as an ayah for soldiers’ children. He soars.”

“He seems to have got above himself,” said the dentist neatly. “I suggest that if scavenging can

only be done by the sweeper caste it must not be permitted to refuse the task. If sweepers shirk, then force them."

This time Mortimer showed frank and curt scorn of an idea. "O I don't think we'll fight sweepers yet. Not a very glorious foe for British arms, is he?" he observed.

Thoyts said in his jolly voice, "I don't mind a rap whom I fight, but I hate fighting," and the little group round the table laughed.

"Must fight disease," interposed Tudor drily.

"This place will be filthy in no time,—filthy," growled Colonel Gallespie with genuine horror. He looked like a man who lived on digestive tabloids and he would have confessed to taking every human statement with salt.

Mortimer, the man with imagination, gave another irrepressible laugh. He saw with his mind's eye the splendid cantonment—spotless as a ship and as highly organised—encompassed by the slatternly, ramshackle eastern land. He saw the crafty spite of agitators who had detached the sweeper caste from its humble fundamental service in order that the degradation of dirt should make Faujpore—bright as ever, but unclean—a laughing stock to India. And he chuckled because he meant to laugh last.

Thoyts, who was a British service man, liked the Commissioner as a cheery soul. He smiled broadly and observed, "It is a situation where you get a small boy pulling a long nose at a sentry. Boy needs a spanking, but warrior does not wish to make a fool of himself by showing resentment.

Well, British troops can take care of themselves. They will do their own job."

"I suppose they would voluntarily give aid to all British households?" put in Mills sharply.

Mortimer said with a force that still had something of robust humour in it, "As you say, Thoyts, the British soldier in the last resort is independent of sweepers or any other man. Still, in the peculiar circumstances, one would like to avoid that way of solving the difficulty. It would enable men in barracks to say to sweepers, 'go to blazes;' but on the other hand these non-co-operation agitators would gloat. They have stirred up this domestic and civic labour trouble, and instigated this hartal* of sweepers, in order to display the British community in a ridiculous light to the masses. The action you suggest would be immediately interpreted to India as an unavoidable and degrading menial duty which they had compelled the Englishman to perform."

"Then this is not just a wage dispute!" exclaimed Mills.

The cantonment magistrate replied raspingly, "This farce is played to a very mixed audience. European labour does not understand Indian caste and is apt to run away with the idea that low caste is derived from poverty, whereas it originates in the Hindu religion. This hartal is political, but it is brought about by the religious and social pressure of the Brahmans. And the silly sweepers have been bribed by being told to demand high wages.

* Strike.

At this moment they are asking about double the pay of an Indian schoolmaster."

Tudor muttered that in the city high caste Hindus were already disillusioned as to the enjoyment they were to derive from the cantonment's predicament, for the sweepers were claiming exorbitant wages from private households and from the municipality. "Great fun. I left Ali Khan trying to settle matters," he said.

"As with all our human needs time's the chief factor," Mortimer observed. "When do you expect the sweepers from Lahore and Nowshera, Gallespie?"

"To-morrow morning, if the trouble has not spread there too," the cantonment magistrate answered. "I wired an hour ago."

"O, then something has been done," said Mills grudgingly.

A stately Brahman chaprassie brought Mortimer a note. He looked up from its pages with a twinkle to say, "Yes, something has been done, though it is invariably doubted. 'The authorities are so weak,' is the sort of thing people love saying. Here's a note from Mrs. Dearlove. She is not very complimentary to you, Gallespie: says she has sent her bhistie with a note to your office twice, but you are nowhere to be found. Same with Ali Khan, but that 'does not surprise' her. So she appeals to me. Dearlove is laid low with fever and the sweeper left this morning. She says, 'I can't imagine why, and the dogs were so fond of him. His family have gone too, though the woman had fever and one of the babies was ill and I gave him

milk for them every day. The servants say no other sweeper will come, and that it is an order. *Whose order?* ' Ah well, there she has got to the point.' He scribbled a few lines on some paper and sent the note to Mrs. Dearlove with his salaams.

There was the noise of a motor coming up the drive. " O Lord, I hope that is not a general. We look perfectly absurd holding a council of war," said Mortimer in comic disgust.

" It is a lady," ejaculated Tudor as a clear voice was heard. " Now you are in for it, Gallespie."

" It is a very annoying matter for them. I hate it for the sergeants' wives and the men's families. It means squalor of a kind," Mortimer growled.

The door opened and Sara walked in. In her pale clothes, with her shining hair and vivid face, she seemed to bring in light. The group of officials discussing affairs did not embarrass her in the least. She advanced upon them without any thought of withdrawal. " Well, here I am again," said she.

Short of an excuse to get rid of her Mortimer had to accept this addition to the council. And he could not take his eyes off her, could not still the sudden racing of all his pulses. She took his chair and he drew up another.

" Have you brought your sweeper with you, Mrs. Mortimer? " rapped out Colonel Gallespie, and at his earnest question and Sara's surprised reply that indeed she had not, for the man had

departed that morning, Mortimer and Thoyts sent up a shout of mirth.

"I intended to leave Murree next Thursday, but as I was deserted by the sweeper I came away to-day. I am glad it is funny," said Sara looking from one to the other.

"There is cholera but no sweeper in Faujpore," Mills said in triumphant gloom, bending towards her. "It seems that the all-powerful British Raj is a perfect farce."

Another motor was heard. "And still they come," remarked the civil surgeon blandly. "Well, I must go. One swallow does not make a summer, Mills, and officially there is no state of cholera existing at present. I wish I could say the same of fever." He stood up and as he faced the door it opened and admitted Ali Khan.

The tall fellow, dressed in European clothes but wearing a dark blue turban, was the colour of a cigar-ash and his lips were like a purple bruise on his haggard face. A gash on his forehead dripped blood at which he dabbed with a large silk handkerchief. He looked more like a stricken than a wounded man. After a glance at him Tudor sat down again.

"Come in, Ali Khan. Do you know Major Thoyts? You have met my wife." Mortimer ignored the deputy-commissioner's damaged aspect till the big man drew up a chair with a dazed expression. Then he enquired, "You've been having a bit of a scrap, eh?"

"Troops should be used," broke out the harsh and agitated voice. "There is no respect for

authority. Mahomedan shops have been looted by sweepers. They have all assembled in the sweepers' market place. The Brahmans, I think, have set them on. If Brahman soldiers fired on them now it would teach them a fine lesson. I went to that market to see if the police were in sufficient force and the crowd was most dangerous and insulting."

"Ah, insulting, were they? They will be insulting us in cantonments next. I must say I quite agree with Mr. Ali Khan that troops should give these people a lesson before it is too late. What is the sense of paying for troops and not making use of them?" cried the exasperated dentist.

"O come, you don't want vengeance, Ali Khan," urged Mortimer, his face suddenly stern. He knew it was exactly what the man from the fierce Salt Range did want. He knew that stalwart Ali Khan on entering his women's apartments would be a discredited power, a miserable man, unless avenged.

"Of course I do not want personal vengeance, sir," declared the highly educated official, very correctly. "It is not a personal matter at all, but a question of respect for government. If they will not fear the Deputy Commissioner, they will not fear to commit crimes against government. There is no safety for respectable men in the city to-day. All are intimidated."

"That's a nasty cut," interrupted Tudor, as Ali Khan used the end of his turban to wipe blood from his eyes. "How did you get it?"

Something savage and elemental shook in the Mahomedan's voice as he replied, "A sweeper threw an old shoe. The nail cut me. It is nothing."

Mortimer put his hand on Ali Khan's broad shoulder. "We chuck shoes after brides and bridegrooms for good luck, but that's a nasty cut as Tudor says." His voice was extraordinarily kind. "Let him have a look at it now. It needs cleaning." Calling the chaprassie he ordered him to put hot water in a bedroom 'for the Deputy Commissioner Sahib.'

"Come on. Soon put that right for you," said the civil surgeon rising.

"It is nothing. I do not care for the cut at all," the Punjabi declared with perfect truth. The insult, not the injury, affected him. Affected him indeed so terribly that with an emotion as primitive as his wrath his flashing eyes filled with tears.

"Can't afford to have you put out of action, Ali Khan," John Mortimer said. "You have got to help me teach these men not to pull our leg again. You'd better let Tudor sew you up."

"Come on," urged Tudor once more. "I'll hurt you far worse than the nail did no doubt, but you won't turn a hair. I know you."

"You doctors cannot upset me," said Ali Khan with simple glee, yielding to the sahibs. "You can do anything at all you please." He followed Tudor whose gruff voice applauded him genially, saying, "I wish there were more of my patients like you."

As the door close behind them Mortimer observed sympathetically to Gallespie, "Rough luck on him," and Gallespie nodded assent.

Thoyts, under his pleasant manner, had formed the very lowest opinion of Ali Khan. A fellow who wiped his eyes. Before a woman, too. And he was impatient because the woman sat there composed and observant, but with a certain ardent air of haste as if it were high time that all departed and left the field to her. It was foolish of Mortimer—who seemed a sensible man in other ways—to permit his wife to take possession of his office when men were talking business. Persuaded that where a weeping official, a dentist, and a lady were gathered together, a soldier's time would be utterly wasted, the Major rose to depart, asking Mortimer to send him word if there were further developments.

As he spoke the chaprassie announced, "The orderly of the Colonel Sahib is without and has brought this note. Also he has brought a sweeper."

"So the species is not extinct," observed Gallespie.

"This, I imagine, is the development that I've been counting on," said John Mortimer with grim satisfaction. He called, "Come here, Arjan Singh."

A burly and bashful Sikh entered and saluted.

"The Colonel Sahib is well?" enquired Mortimer.

"He is well, Sahib," said the sepoy. "The regiment has this very hour arrived in the Lines,

being free from sickness by your Honour's kindness."

He stood erect and rigid in the room while his Colonel's brother read the note that he had carried, since correspondence may not pass through sweeper-hands. He was perfectly content in this company, though as dumb as one deprived of the power of speech. He knew these men, who under no circumstances would slight him or browbeat him. It was seldom necessary or judicious to tell them lies, and they uneconomically spoke the truth. Since he was a little boy he had heard of sahibs from his father, who had served in the Army. Times changed, but Arjan Singh's faith in the white man was unalterable. It constituted the romance of the life of this mercenary soldier.

Mortimer turned to Thoyts and said, "My brother informs me that his regimental sweepers have just volunteered for all scavenging work in cantonments. I hoped they would. This is better than ordering them to do so. The sweepers of other Indian units will follow suit, no doubt."

"That's excellent," said Thoyts.

"They will receive extra pay : it is only fair," said the cantonment magistrate.

Mortimer addressed the Indian soldier. "The sweepers of your regiment have volunteered to do all the work that the Sarkar* wishes," he said.

"Followers are obedient men, Sahib," Arjan Singh observed mildly.

* Government.

"Well done," said John Mortimer, his eyes twinkling shrewdly.

Sara leant forward and said to Major Thoyts, "We are in a strange land, are we not?"

"Bedlam," he agreed, and added, "But the Mortimers know how to handle it; luckily."

"Luckily, for India," she said.

The little gathering broke up. John Mortimer turned to Sara. "How shall you amuse yourself? The Cantonment's problem is soon settled. Disciplined men, you see. But I must be off to the city which is a very different game."

"I'll amuse myself counting the hours till you return," was the surprising answer.

The day passed. Shadows lengthened and air and earth chilled. The cantonment good-humouredly maintained its healthy standards, and the city heard this and was impressed. It heard that the British soldier was not scavenging; on the contrary the sweepers of Indian regiments were working like ants; and picking up gold and silver as reward. High caste Hindu soldiers and Mahomedan soldiers had no approval for the hartal that the city had hatched. Soiled and irritable the city fretted through the day. In trying to throw mud at the British its own hands had become of the earth earthy. Flies and sweepers remained astir in the sweepers' quarter, buzzing and fussing. John Mortimer went to have a look at them. They were poor, pathetic stuff. Feet had been set on their necks for generations beyond all tally, and those were not white feet. At times that outcast crowd knew festivity: the marriages of sweepers

were riotous and expensive vivacities. But to-day, tossing there in the market, the men and women and children looked puny, looked a scum. There were strong wills among them, deep superstitions, cunning avarice : they had been worked up till the heat of their passions possessed the force of steam. But the Indian police had the city well in hand by the evening, for behind their harsh ranks was the prestige of John Mortimer. He had taught Faujpore a lesson in August which it had learnt by heart. He did not have to repeat it in October. It was enough for the city to know that he was there. The hartal committed suicide. All danger of rioting and violence came to an end. The city, dirty and unkempt, scratched itself and went to sleep, unsmiling.

Sara greeted her husband's return from under the darkening arches of the verandah. " Well? " she cried.

" The matter is settled," he told her.

" I knew you Mortimers would settle it," said Sara with a queer note of satisfaction in her voice.

" Shall I send word to Digby to dine with us? " John asked reluctantly.

" No," said unhesitating Sara, " not for worlds. No, send Digby my love and ask him to come some other time. I want to talk to you to-night."

And at something significant in her bearing the affairs of the armed cantonment and eastern city and remote villages receded into a silent background in John Mortimer's life. Here, in his house, was a mystery to face that a man faces alone

and with all his strength. His world seemed to hold only the spell of an intimate personal appeal threatened by sublime peril, as in Eden on the first night of love.

“ Fool! all that is, at all
Lasts ever, past recall,
Earth changes, but thy Soul and God stand sure.
What entered into Thee
That was, is, and shall be,
Time's wheel runs back or stops, Potter and Clay endure.”

“ Now,” said Sara Mortimer.

“ At last,” John commented.

They confronted each other in his office, after dinner, and their thoughts and emotions were remote from the purpose of that official room. Maps and files might have become invisible for all that Mortimer saw of them. He saw only Sara, wearing the white dress which Prestbury had admired: spotlessly white it looked against the background of the ruby curtains. He thought he had never seen any woman as tensely still as his wife was; not a gesture, not a fidget, moved those colourless fabrics that fell about her, nor animated her pale arms and hands and silver shod feet. Yet she was never passive for an instant, and as once before he noticed the swift race of her breath, the visible panic of her heart.

“ I am ready to talk this thing out, John,” Sara

began deliberately. "Will you please really listen? Nine people out of ten do not give one their attention; they merely observe one while one speaks."

"I can listen and look. I have told you before that I enjoy looking at you." He spoke unemotionally, resolved to maintain an impartial atmosphere of fair play.

"Yes, I know you do," Sara remarked, "but I have to speak to you of unseen things. It is your imagination, not your impressions, that I want."

"I'll listen all right," Mortimer promised, and settled himself heavily in his chair.

"Our honeymoon was bliss to me," Sara began. These, her first words, immediately placed him in a state of amazement. He had not thought his bride rapturous. There had been a silence, a delicacy. But Sara's voice, in which lay her power of self-assertion and ascendancy, carried conviction.

"I knew it for a critical adventure," she continued, "and when I found myself so surprised, so conquered, and so rejoicing, I realized in what peril such a wonderful thing as marriage must perpetually exist. It is easy to destroy ecstasy."

"I was more lucky than I knew," Mortimer interposed quietly.

She went on very softly. "The thing was safeguarded by such loveliness. I was conscious that we made a splendid pair, you and I. But it was not only that: the sky was so gay, a perfect blue. Do you remember? And the harvest moon was fairy-like; an enchantress. O, it made a magic part of my honeymoon, that moon did. Doesn't

the stage scenery matter to the actress? All that beauty enhanced the experience to me. But there was nothing of solemnity missing either. There was the sense of our vows, and all the ardour of the music and the prayers in church. When I was wedded to you no vital element was lacking in the miracle, the marvel."

"You have a tremendous ideal of marriage then?" Mortimer asked. He was deeply stirred and as deeply perplexed.

She gave an unexpected laugh that did not seem to shake her stillness. "I don't wonder that you are surprised. See,—it was like this with me; I was awed, I was thrilled, by the sheer power of that honeymoon. I was Sara White and it transformed me into Sara Somebody Else."

"Yes; I did that," said John, with an instant assumption of responsibility.

"You don't expect perfection, do you, John?" Sara questioned ominously and went on without waiting for a reply. "Because there is nothing perfect about me. Being Mrs. Mortimer, with you at the other end of the world, was a difficult job and I muddled it."

Both dwelt in silence upon that word 'muddled,' and then she continued. "You realize for how brief a time we were together? As a companion and a character you grew vague to me after we parted. Not at once, but before very long, I'm afraid. I could not remember much that you had said, except as a lover. But there remained an indelible impression: I was yours."

"And you regretted it?" he suggested.

“Not—like that; not just, ‘O dear, I’ve made a mistake. How can I get out of it?’,” she replied quickly. “You did not disillusion me. You existed at an appalling distance, representing a vital fact in my life. And existence challenged me. You see I went off, as your bride, to nurse Russian wounded, saying to myself, ‘Now I know what life is.’ Before you could say Jack Robinson, I knew what death was. Not only death, but pain and frightful struggles of body and mind. To me the misery of failure was the most intimidating knowledge of all. Men who failed in their own eyes; men who failed in the sight of others. Failed in spite of unimaginable efforts of the spirit and the flesh. Some seemed doomed to be denied victory or glory. And there is a demoralising influence in disaster and disgrace. John, I hated failure and I set myself to win through, to preserve the romance of my honeymoon with its honour intact. I resisted all love making, while I was a Red Cross nurse.”

Yes, it was inevitably his imagination that she addressed. In her visible and immaculate daintiness he could observe nothing of storm or stress or long rough road, but despite the elimination of every incident her speech conveyed to him an exact picture of her difficulties in Russian hospitals in military centres; desired, demanded and denied, while the hazards of peril and transitory joy glamourised every relationship. “I can understand the men all right,” Mortimer said with grim candour.

“O how they fought, those men!” murmured

Sara. "I am no military critic—what are strategy or tactics to my mind which is untrained to appreciate them? All that passed me by. I *saw* the wounds and the hardships, the indomitable resoluteness to attack and to endure. There were the vagaries of will, too, and the fluctuations of morale. When a soldier went smash, collapsed under what was physically or mentally beyond his limit of resistance, one realized that the whole vast structure was delicately and vitally sustained by ideas of honour and duty, tradition and discipline. You asked me to join you in India, but how could I desert those wounded allies of ours? They sacrificed life; was I too weak to sacrifice love?"

"At that time you loved me?" he asked, very intent upon her. Sara had no reason to complain of Mortimer as a listener. She saw that he awaited information and was not disposed to pounce upon this or that statement to confirm his own preconceptions of what she was, and what she had done.

"I had no aching tenderness for you, then, nor any deep affection. It *interested* me intensely to snatch my marriage from destruction, to keep it inviolate. I wanted to retain the power to renew our honeymoon with its pride triumphant," Sara replied.

"Your sense of honour dominated everything else," suggested Mortimer.

"For three years honour held the field," said Sara. "Then the nightmare began. Oaths of allegiance were broken, thousands deserted from every front, regiments would not fight the enemy. Soldiers and sailors mutined. Officers were

insulted and murdered. Everything was desecrated. First the Kerensky régime, and then the Bolshevik triumph, proclaimed new ideals while I saw all mine profaned. The glory had departed."

Mortimer thought that her whole form looked like a sculptured figure by a tomb, in her marble stillness, her air of finality, her steadfast sense of nearness to perished armies, vanished forces."

"Standards went down one by one," said Sara. "Russia made a separate peace. Far away the British Empire fought on. I retained a dreadful sense of responsibility to myself as being British. I was not political, I was not neutral, I was simply British."

"British and married, that is how you saw yourself?" Mortimer suggested.

"Yes, and I often thought myself a fool into the bargain," she declared. "For what did the British Empire know or care about me? And I was absolutely in the dark as to what you might be up to, you know."

"You are a tenacious fighter, Sara," Mortimer said.

"Well, I lost my pluck," Sara told him bluntly. "Typhus and imprisonment, filth and starvation and disillusion knocked my nerve to pieces. When I had the luck to escape from Moscow I was in a panic to destroy all clues to my identity; so I met the world as a widow, a Greek by marriage and an American by birth. It was a very poor impromptu on my part, but it disposed of you and Great Britain very thoroughly. Do you realize that? You see we tend to become what people think us. I could

no longer disgrace my country nor betray my husband in the eyes of my divided and incoherent world. It was a dreadful sort of liberty. All values were in a state of confusion in my mind when I met Lavretsky."

Mortimer stiffened, he was to confront his rival without mystery at last.

"We have come to this point again and again," said Sara. "I have always manœuvred to postpone a disclosure."

Then, without emphasis, comment, or gesture, but with such a look in her eyes as might have watched the flight of an arrow, or waited for the impact of a shot on a target—the aim taken and unalterable, the hit or miss a hazard of fate—Sara said, "I never became Lavretsky's mistress."

If she had spent her whole life training her will, developing her personality, cultivating her beauty, to the end that when she uttered those five words she would be believed, here was her triumph. Without a shadow of a doubt Mortimer believed her.

"If I had lived with him I should not be here now," she added simply.

Mortimer stood up as though released from a long, intolerable and cramping vigil. He said, "I wish to God that I could claim to have had no doubts of you. But you *know* what I thought,—what I feared. I come no better out of this than any other ass who prides himself on knowing the world."

Sara observed without resentment, "All your knowledge of the world was ranged against me,

John. The French were very certain of what they held to be my relationship with Lavretsky."

"I should have relied on my own intuitions," he said remorsefully. "What a splendid ending it would have been to your great adventures if I had met you in Faupore with a declaration that I did not believe a word of those lying rumours. I've missed the chance of a lifetime."

"Ah, those things happen only in fairyland," said Sara. "A fairy prince would have done that."

"There has been estrangement, humiliation and pain for me since your arrival, Sara," Mortimer said. "Why were you stubbornly silent for so long?"

"I had only my word to offer as proof," Sara replied very forcibly. "So that it had to be a word in season, a word with a singleness of purpose behind it. A word that was I,—the whole of me."

He stood, looking down on her, and declared, "The very first night that you arrived you sat in that cane chair, and I waited for you to speak. Instead, you fell asleep. If you had spoken then I should have believed you, I *think*."

"Perhaps. Who knows?" she said, incredulous. "But the truth wasn't in me then. You forget my story, even while I tell it. Look, John—in Russia every beaten track by which one knew the way was out of repair or obliterated when, stumbling along, I met Lavretsky. He attracted and fascinated me. And he put hope into me, for where I saw only calamity he inspired faith in good coming out of evil. I loathed Bolshevik methods and aims and deeds, but my immediate task was to

work for the rescue of cold and starving human beings. And I had many opportunities of helping allied prisoners. I risked a great deal for them." For the first time she showed indignation. "Your friends here have called me Bolshevik because I have not spent my time abusing Russians. I tell you I love Russia and the Russians. Remember that I had been in close contact with the valour of their old army." After a pause she said, as though reasoning with an obstinate antagonist, "Put it like this to yourself: there are two Indias and two Irelands in 1921. I have known two Russias. And there were two Lavretskys."

"I hate and curse Lavretsky," said John Mortimer with concentrated energy.

It was dreadful to him to see her wince and fling her hand up as though to stop him, but he repeated his opinion, "Hate and curse the fellow."

"If you had uttered those words the night I came to Faujpore I might have hated you," she said in a strange voice. "On whose side was I then, John? I'm not one to sit on the fence. He was young, just my age, and so quick and strong and loving. He was an author before the war made him an unwilling soldier, and his imagination lit things up till there was never a dull moment. He had theories with which to justify every passion—he made you see life as immense and it carried you off your feet. O, I admit that he was a phrase-maker, but they were phrases that ran in one's mind like a tune. Just to watch his bright brown eyes in his funny emphatic face was like watching a nimble stream, all adventure and activity. No one

could have greater magnetism, no one. His will was terrific, it dominated everything like a blizzard when he was roused to action. I don't pretend that I was as intellectual as Lavretsky, nor as well-educated; but I influenced him, and he was—O, wonderful to influence; there was such grace, such impetuous generosity, in every concession that he made. He caused one to feel that one was all charm, all success, and for the time all-powerful. By contrast with Lavretsky other people seemed ineffectual, colourless, limited."

"You tell me a queer tale," said Mortimer sombrely. "Your marriage with me was unknown; you had been away from me nearly four years and your emotions had forgotten me. You were in love with Lavretsky, and in matters of life and death subject to him. . . ."

For the first time all her stillness stirred. Bending towards him she asked, "Yes,—what conclusion do you draw, John?"

"I have your word for it that you were not his mistress," Mortimer replied steadily. "What saved you, Sara?"

"I sickened over treachery," she told him through white lips. "I had seen it at such close quarters. Deep down in me there was the pride of being a British woman. *We*, the British, made no separate peace. *We* stuck to our traditions to the end. *We* didn't go back on kings and allies, on officers or the sacrifices of the dead. So I agonised to retain my personal honour. But . . . the surrender of Kut was not treachery. Do you understand? At times I was so thrilled with him

that if he had forced me to be his I should not have suffered. No, I should not have suffered—then. But except to force I would not yield. Not I. To keep faith with you was to keep faith with—everything British.”

“You are a patriot,” Mortimer said with a glow about him. A glow that died as he asked, “But Lavretsky?”

“He was afraid,” said Sara. “Weirdly afraid. His grandmother, a Bulgarian, had imbued him with the Bulgarian superstition that a man who takes a woman’s virtue from her by force will perish by force. The dread was deep in him. Every nerve responded to it. I am here to-night because of the influence of some old woman with witch’s thoughts. My honeymoon is safe because Lavretsky’s superstitions made him spare me. O John, what a labyrinth is life!”

“Morals are made of strange stuff in your story,” Mortimer commented. Then he brought his fist down suddenly upon the table. “When you arrived here, with those closed lips of yours, what was your purpose?”

“My exact purpose?” she shut her eyes and Mortimer felt strongly that she was examining the past carefully, but in doubt. “I think nothing was exact. I had confused thoughts, but I did not expect to care for you much. . . . He had been killed—and he so loved life! I met him first when he was just sick and sorry and lovable. Death separated us when he had been gentle to me for days and days. I saw him murdered, and his dying like that gave him great power over my heart.

I can see those quick fingers of his grope out to clutch at my dress : his last thought was of me. His hold on my emotions had kept me stretched on the rack for two years, but when he died I struggled no more. I let his memory flood over me. And yet I had nothing to remember—in one sense.”

“ You say you could not have told me all this before? ” he persisted.

Sara looked at him with astonished eyes. “ Of course not. I had to find out lots of things first. I did not know whether our marriage was to hold good, or whether in spite of its survival Lavretsky had really taken me from you. I was a house divided against itself. I had sacrificed everything to my marriage, and yet I would not live with you as a wife while I still loved Lavretsky. Until I knew what I should come to *feel* about you and about him I had nothing definite to say. Nothing.”

Mortimer said jealously, “ Your pride and your ideals have resisted tremendous temptations. You are most wonderfully my wife, but that fellow has meant more to you than I have ever done.”

Her fateful voice replied, “ People who pass through a great tribulation come back as strangers. I have been under an evil star. I have been among the heathen, led away after false gods. John, I was brought up to regard marriage as a sacrament ;—do you imagine that religious emotion and tradition sway only those Punjabi women who live around us here, all unseen? You were *inside* the magic circle that surrounds one like a aura. Instinctive things of the blood brought you close to

me; the same race, the same breeding, the creeds and prejudices that come down through centuries to the nursery,—to the honeymoon! Lavretsky was foreign to all that.”

Mortimer shook his head. “I have not your blazing imagination. In commonplace language you and I have more in common no doubt. But you loved the fellow: what has changed that?”

“Yes,” she said, with an air of shock. “I did love him, didn’t I? But I never trusted him, and I made him swear one thing to me. I suppose I *made* him swear it. The thing was frightfully important;—this: had he, or had he not, as an officer in the P—— regiment of the VII S—— Corps, any part or lot in the massacre of the other officers which took place in July nineteen seventeen?” She paused, and in that silence the vital nature of the question, the doubt, and the oath emerged clearly defined and inexorable.

“I had known some of them in hospital the year before. But it was not because they were friends of mine:—it was the one deed that was outside the pale in my eyes. He was a member of that regiment’s Committee after the trouble began in the Army. O, if I had held him guilty of fraternising with the enemy, betraying the Allies, mutinying against his brother officers, I would have flung off the very touch of his hand! He swore that he was absent, on leave, when the massacre took place. He vowed that he had had nothing to do with such treachery. He furiously denied any guilt. I chose to believe him.”

“And he had?” demanded Mortimer.

“He had,” Sara said. “Olga Koltcheskoff’s brother-in-law was in the P—— regiment. She told me the truth. Lavretsky betrayed, mutinied, deserted. Every suspicion that I stifled confirms her statements.”

Sara seemed to spring to life, all movement and animation—“Phew! That’s over,” she said. “I’m British and we fought to a finish. I’m an officer’s daughter and I stand by the honour of armies.” With a sudden fierce gesture she snapped the fingers of both her raised hands. “None of that for me. I’m clear of all those powers of evil at last. No more foreign influence for me. I’m here. I’m home. Love a traitor? Not I. I do not abandon Lavretsky—I repudiate him!”

“The swine,” said John Mortimer, and watched Sara school herself to hear him pronounce the words.

“His personality was attractive to me,” she admitted with a grave horror in her eyes—“but his character as it stands revealed is repulsive.”

“Let that be your last word about Lavretsky,” Mortimer said forcibly.

If submission was never very evident in Sara’s manner in her inmost soul she accepted the inevitable. “I told Digby once that you Mortimers aim at peace with victory,” she murmured.

John Mortimer suddenly spoke to her in a changed voice—“In what does my victory consist, Sara?”

She was silent and he grimly reminded her. “You refused my kisses, apologised, and offered to shake hands with me,—well?”

Sara replied rapidly, "Digby called me a dreamer, but I don't possess a sleepy nature and even my dreams are vivid things. To touch my lips was to touch a live wire,—realities. And I was not ready, I'm slow till I'm sure. I believe I was right to wait. One is never 'quite' right in the way that one is 'quite' dead, but to embrace you and yet deny you your rights as a husband would have been a rotten thing to do, John."

"Seven years I've waited for you," said John Mortimer, "and now you must make a final choice. You are my guest still; a candid friend. But only for to-night. You've often talked of going away during the last six weeks. If you want to leave you'd be wise to depart to-morrow morning, Sara, for by God if you are here to-morrow night I'll make you my wife again."

She sprang to her feet, crying, "Have you counted the cost? You believe me, but no one else will. I shall never be free from suspicion. I admire your rule, John, but I shall be held disloyal. Remember that. People won't trust me. Do you care?"

"No, I don't care," he told her. "I can face facts. I know from your own words that you are here because Lavretsky's superstitions made him spare you but——"

She interrupted him. "Well, and if I *do* owe something to sheer luck, who despises luck? I don't. I say of my fate, 'all's well that ends well.' " And then she faced him, once and for all beyond the influence of morbid regrets, vain misgivings, divided allegiance,

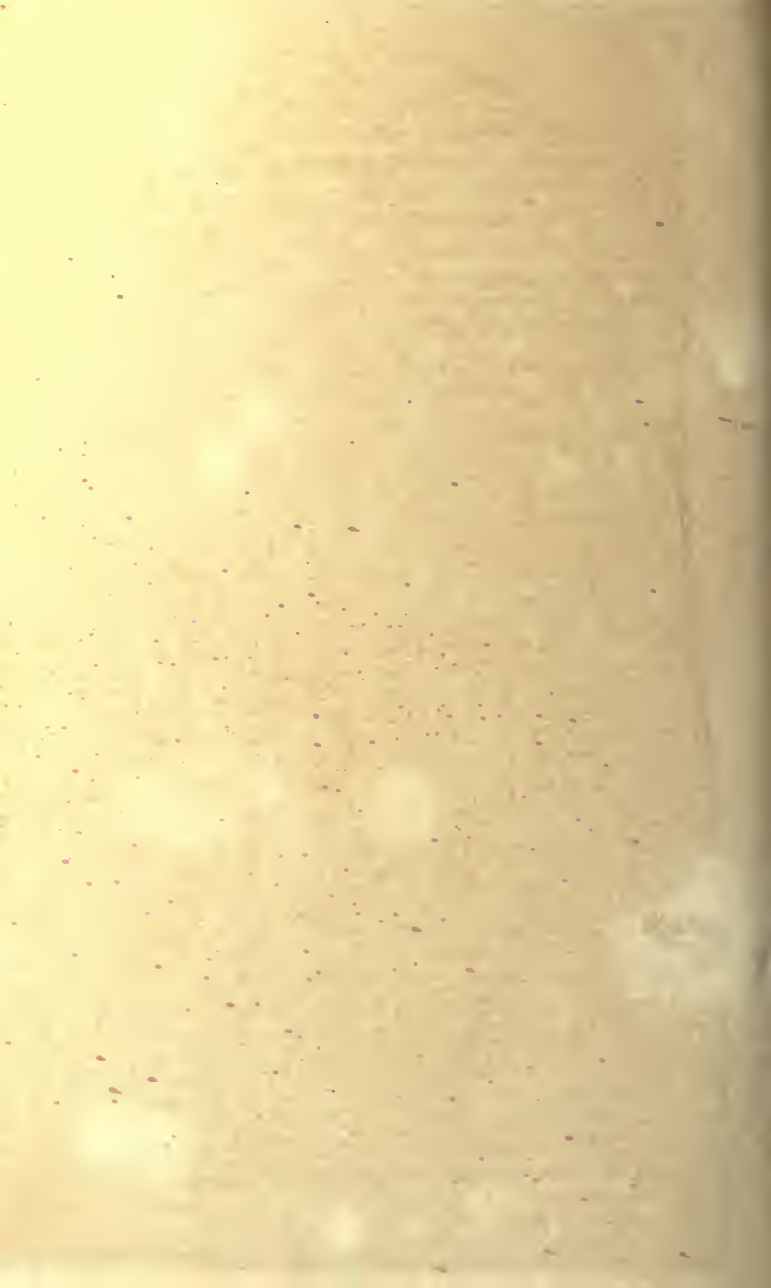
Still he did not touch her, but demanded almost fiercely, "You talk of fate. Do you know what your fate is now, Sara?"

"To love you," she replied in passionate surrender.

Then he held her with a strength and ardour that joyfully welcomed her home at last. "The fruits of victory," he said, his lips on hers. And then he blurted out, "You had no choice left, Sara—I would never have let you go to-night! Never in this world."

"I knew you would not," said Sara, triumphant.

THE END



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